



ExcelinEd

# Education Policy Playbook

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2022

CHANGING POLICY,  
CHANGING LIVES



# Education Policy Playbook

## POLICIES FOR TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

Every state leader has the extraordinary opportunity to make a lasting impact on their state's economy, quality of life and future success of its citizens through sound and impactful education policy. A quality education provides the foundation for individuals to live a fulfilling and purposeful life, and it's a necessary ingredient for vibrant communities and a thriving economy.

The pandemic, which in 2020 closed schools across the nation and—absent devices and digital connectivity—left [9 million students](#) without access to learning, has exacerbated gaps in what is essentially a failing system. More than 15 percent of high schoolers [fail to graduate](#), national assessments find [students' reading and math skills are stagnant or falling](#), and internationally, the U.S. ranks [25th](#) in education, a mediocre position for the most accomplished nation on earth.

**Sound education policy can change that.**

Proven and innovative policies and visionary state leaders can transform education to ensure success for each and every child. From robust early literacy programs rooted in the science of reading to 21st-century education-to-workforce pathways, strong systems prioritize students over bureaucracies and ensure schools deliver on the promise of a quality education.

**Policy changes lives.**

For more than a decade, the **Foundation for Excellence in Education** (ExcelinEd) has been at the forefront of a movement to transform education. We promote powerful state-level, student-centered policies that transform education and, quite literally, change lives.

Massive challenges created by the pandemic—and renewed resolve to address educational access and opportunity—have sounded an urgent call to action for students and their future. For the first time in perhaps a century, *every* aspect of a student's education experience must be reexamined and reimaged.

ExcelinEd works with state leaders in advancing solutions that improve student learning, expand opportunity and ready students for a career and postsecondary education. State policymakers can create change by taking intentional, strategic and proven steps toward five priority and meaningful outcomes, described in the following pages.

**“States are the incubators of innovation. With a relentless focus on advancing big and bold policies, governors and state leaders can prioritize students and transform education to give our next generation of citizens the very brightest of futures.”**



**Jeb Bush**  
43rd Governor of Florida



# Education Policy Playbook

## POLICIES FOR TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

### CLOSE LEARNING GAPS



- Ensure every child can read by the end of 3rd grade.
- Assess learning each year to make sure every student counts.
- Hold schools accountable for student outcomes and content mastery.
- Inform educators and parents about student progress to empower intervention.
- Equitably distribute high-performing teachers to meet the needs of all students.
- Distribute funding equitably across all public schools.

### BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



- Provide widespread device and internet access for underserved students.
- Offer high-quality instruction through online learning platforms and high-quality curriculum.
- Support schools and teachers with professional development in online learning.
- Develop online services for special education, English language learners and social and emotional well-being.
- Establish technology and instructional education accounts for families.

### EMPOWER FAMILIES WITH OPPORTUNITY



- Eliminate school district boundaries for families to enroll their children in any public school in the state.
- Grow high-quality public charter schools that are equitably funded.
- Allow all education dollars to follow the student.
- Level the playing field for special-needs and low-income families through education scholarship accounts.
- Unbundle education at the course level.

### STRENGTHEN PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE + CAREER



- Develop a continuum of policies and programs that support student pathways aligned with higher-skill, higher-wage and in-demand jobs.
- Blur the lines between high school and postsecondary through college acceleration and innovative school models.
- Support students in navigating pathway options and through key transition points to college and career.
- Connect data systems across secondary, postsecondary and workforce to know if students and programs are successful.

### REIMAGINE LEARNING



- Redesign 12th grade to include relevant postsecondary and career experiences.
- Provide credit for learning and experiences earned outside of schools.
- Personalize learning with a flexible path and pace to achieve mastery.
- Reconsider the structure of school to include new models such as microschools and learning pods.
- Fund education based on the value of learning instead of time spent in seats.
- Rethink traditional hiring practices and allow teachers to bring school to students.

The following briefs describe how and why these policies can truly transform education in our states and, consequently, each state's future.



# Close Learning Gaps

GUARANTEEING EVERY CHILD RECEIVES ACADEMIC SUPPORT  
TO LEARN, SUCCEED AND ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL



## POLICY: EARLY LITERACY

From kindergarten through third grade, children are learning to read. Then in fourth grade, they transition to use reading to learn. The ability to read opens doors and opportunities that each child deserves. Without this ability, however, students are hindered in achieving their full potential.

### WHY FOCUS ON EARLY LITERACY?

Failure in early literacy is not only an education problem, it's an **economic and social problem, too**. According to an Annie E. Casey Foundation [report](#), children who are not reading proficiently in third grade are *four times* more likely to drop out of high school. Black and Hispanic students who are not proficient readers are *six times* more likely than proficient readers to drop out.

- According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 7 out of every 10 prison inmates can't read above a fourth-grade level.
- High school dropouts are not eligible for 90 percent of the jobs in the economy. And dropouts make up nearly half of all heads-of-households on welfare.

Literacy is linked to better health, higher levels of civic engagement and higher earnings in the labor market. It is imperative to address the illiteracy problem in our schools early. The future of our students and our communities depends on it.





# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: EARLY LITERACY

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### ESTABLISH A COMPREHENSIVE, STATEWIDE K-3 READING PROGRAM THAT INCLUDES:

- **Assessment and Parent Notification:** Administer a universal statewide early literacy screening within the first 30 days of school and notify parents if their child has a reading deficiency.
- **Individualized Instruction:** For students identified with a reading deficiency, establish individual reading plans using proven reading interventions for during the school day, before/after school and summer reading camp plus home reading strategies for parents.
- **Support for Teachers:** ① Ensure teacher training programs are preparing teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills to teach all students to read; ② Provide statewide training on scientifically based reading research, with job-embedded training for teachers via reading coaches.
- **Test-based Promotion and Intervention:** Retain third graders who are severely below grade level and provide intensive interventions and specialized support from a highly effective teacher.

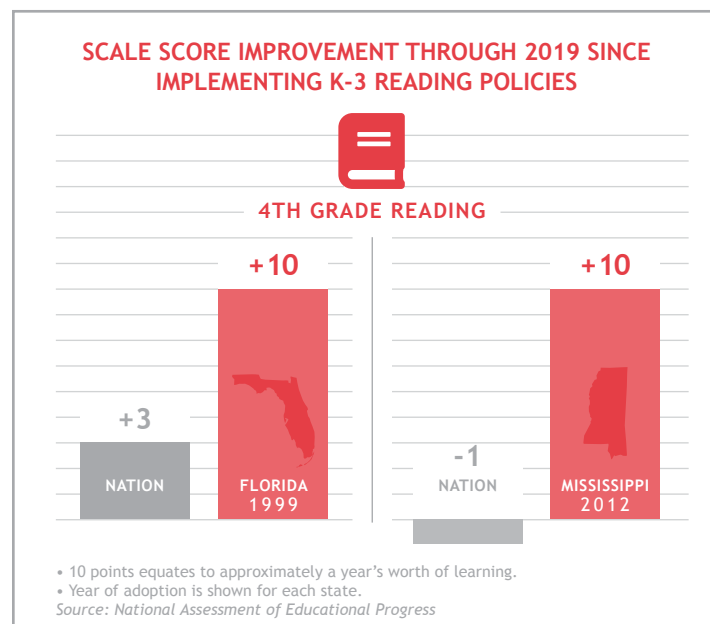
#### TAKE EXECUTIVE ACTION TO PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY.

- **Set an Ambitious Goal:** e.g., 90% of third graders in our state will be proficient readers by [year].
- **Invest in Reading:** e.g., offer free summer reading camps for struggling readers.
- **Build a Statewide Literacy Campaign:** e.g., with philanthropic support, ensure every newborn receives his/her first book as he/she leaves the hospital.

### POLICY IMPACT

#### STUDENT OUTCOMES SUPPORT K-3 READING POLICY.

Since passing a comprehensive early literacy policy, Florida is ranked **6th** in the nation in fourth grade **reading achievement**. Mississippi is ranked **1st** in the nation in fourth grade **reading improvements** from 2017-2019.



#### RESEARCH ON FLORIDA'S K-3 READING POLICY FOUND THESE IMPROVEMENTS:

- Significant learning gains in the early grades.<sup>1</sup>
- Increased performance within third grade.<sup>1</sup>
- Retained students have a higher probability of graduating with a regular diploma.<sup>1</sup>
- Reduction in retentions in later grades.<sup>2</sup>
- Retained students, when compared to similar but promoted students, graduate with higher GPAs and take fewer remedial courses in high school.<sup>2</sup>
- Significant and meaningful average test-score improvements within the third grade.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [The Costs and Benefits of Test-Based Promotion](#), Marcus Winters 2017

<sup>2</sup> [The Effects of Test-Based Retention on Student Outcomes Over Time: Regression discontinuity evidence from Florida](#), Guido Schwerdt, Martin R. West, Marcus A. Winters 2017

<sup>3</sup> [Test-Based Promotion and Student Performance in Florida and Arizona](#), Paul Perrault, Marcus Winters 2020



# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: EARLY LITERACY

### RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- [ExcelinEd's Early Literacy Fundamental Principles](#)
- [ExcelinEd Early Literacy Model Policy](#)
- [ExcelinEd K-3 Reading Impact Studies State-by-State Summary](#)
- [ExcelinEd K-3 Reading Communications Toolkit](#)



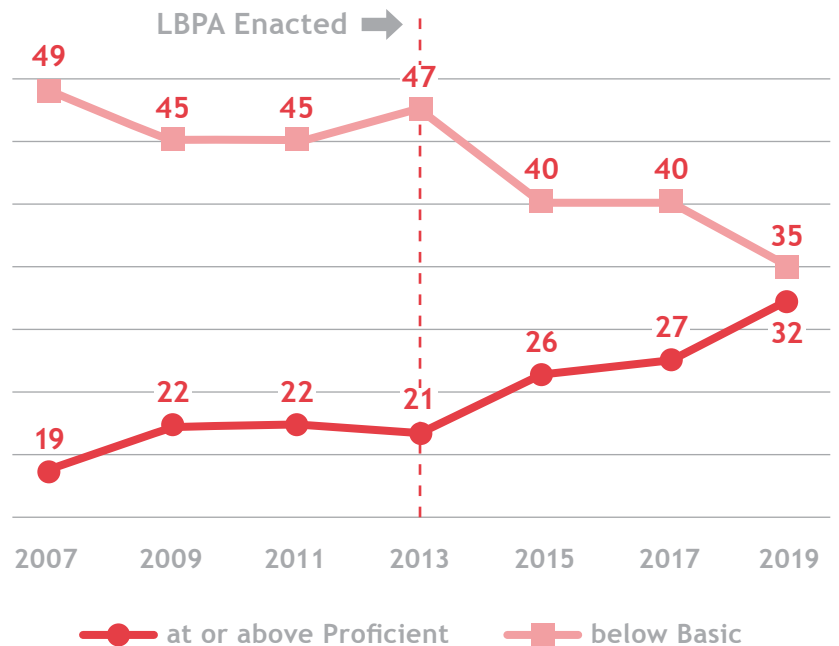
#### STATE SPOTLIGHT: MISSISSIPPI

Since the enactment of Mississippi's Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA), the state has made substantial improvement in student reading achievement, as demonstrated by both state and national tests. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Grade 4 Reading, Mississippi has increased student proficiency by roughly six percentage points, while decreasing the percent of students below basic by about seven percentage points since the enactment of LBPA in 2013. Mississippi is now 1st in the nation for improvements in 4th grade reading.

*“Our students are making historic gains in achievement levels and have made Mississippi one of the fastest improving states in the nation... Mississippi students are rewriting the story about public education in our state.”*

**Dr. Carey Wright**  
State Superintendent of  
Education

#### MISSISSIPPI 4TH GRADE READING PERFORMANCE ON NAEP





# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: FEWER, BETTER TESTS

Quality assessments are essential elements of impactful school accountability, academic rigor and effective classroom instruction that prepares students for postsecondary success. However, parents and teachers have long argued that children are over-tested, and that valuable instructional time is lost “teaching to the test.”

### WHY FOCUS ON ASSESSMENTS?

Simple and effective policy changes can ensure that assessments serve their real purpose: measuring student achievement and providing actionable results that improve instruction and student learning. Fewer, better tests policy solutions give teachers more time to teach and ensure parents and teachers have access to easy-to-understand information to help their student.

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### PROVIDE MORE TIME FOR INSTRUCTION.

- Move the state assessment to the last three weeks of school and shorten the state testing window to give teachers more instruction time, eliminate cramming prior to the test and reduce “dead time/movie time” after the test administration.
- Procure statewide summative assessments to allow for the piloting of flexible administration to allow students to demonstrate mastery when ready. This may mean allowing districts or schools to administer the state summative assessment once per quarter or when students are ready.

#### STREAMLINE AND IMPROVE STATE AND DISTRICT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS.

- Reduce the number of assessments by eliminating duplicative, low-quality or unnecessary tests.
- Provide technical assistance for selecting and using instructional assessments, such as screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring and interim assessments.
- Independently evaluate the alignment of nationally recognized college entrance tests (e.g., SAT, ACT) to state standards in high school.
- Work with institutions of higher education in the state to identify a performance level or score on the state test that can be used for admissions and/or for placement into non-remedial postsecondary coursework.

#### EMPOWER TEACHERS WITH USEABLE, TIMELY INFORMATION.

- Require student score reports for state assessments to be provided *both* to the current year teacher and incoming teacher of record to better inform instruction (e.g., provide the 5th grade teacher all 4th grade student score reports to better tailor instruction at the start of school).
- Require all results from *district required tests* to be provided to teachers within 48 hours or a shortened timeframe to inform instruction. If the data are not turned around quickly to classroom teachers, the local test is taking away valuable teaching time and not being used as a diagnostic tool.



# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: FEWER, BETTER TESTS

### INNOVATE.

- Transition to innovative, technology-based assessment models.
- Utilize online assessments to accelerate both delivery and scoring of assessments.

### PROVIDE BETTER, ACTIONABLE INFORMATION TO PARENTS.

- Ensure parents understand the student expectations for each grade level, how teachers will help students reach them, and how the summative assessments measure student proficiency on those expectations.
- Require the state and districts to provide clear, transparent information to parents about their child's performance, progress, strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- Require all results from state and district tests to be provided to parents within a useful timeframe.

## FEWER, BETTER TESTS: IT'S WHAT PARENTS AND TEACHERS WANT

THESE SOLUTIONS ENJOY BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT ACCORDING TO RECENTLY CONDUCTED NATIONAL SURVEYS:

**76%**

**OF TEACHERS AND  
73 PERCENT OF PARENTS**  
agreed that moving statewide,  
standardized tests to the last three  
weeks of the school year will give  
teachers more time to teach.

**86%**

**OF TEACHERS**  
surveyed said that receiving copies  
of the state assessment results for  
both their current and incoming  
students would help them prepare  
instruction tailored to each student.

**66%**

**OF PARENTS**  
surveyed believe state  
standardized tests give them  
helpful information about their  
child's academic progress.

## EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND, PARENT-FRIENDLY SCORE REPORTS

STATE ASSESSMENT RESULTS ARE THE SOLE PIECE OF INFORMATION THE STATE PROVIDES DIRECTLY TO PARENTS, SO SCORE REPORTS SHOULD PROVIDE HELPFUL INFORMATION TO PARENTS ABOUT THEIR CHILD.

- A clear explanation of the student's performance.
- Information on the student's areas of strengths and areas for improvement.
- Specific actions and resources to assist parents.
- Longitudinal information, if available.
- Information comparing the student's score to all students in the district, state or other states.



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: CALIFORNIA

California works with [Spotlight Education](#) to translate student assessment data into high-impact, customized narrative reports and personalized videos for parents.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- [ExcelinEd Resources: Fewer, Better Tests](#)
- [ExcelinEd Fewer, Better Tests Policy Recommendations](#)





## POLICY: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

Our ability to prepare students for a successful and fulfilling life will determine America's future as a nation. While many factors contribute to raising student achievement, experience shows that by holding schools accountable for student learning—by measuring student performance against objective standards—we see results.

Creating a school accountability system that ensures students are ready for college and career by the time they graduate high school is imperative for all K-12 systems. Grading schools on an A-F scale, a policy designed in Florida and used in 14 other states, creates a shared sense of urgency for excellence, heightens focus on school quality, generates community support and provides clear information that everyone can understand.

### WHY FOCUS ON SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY?

Because *what gets measured, gets done*. School accountability is the foundation for a strong state education system. Successful accountability systems set high expectations and underscore that all children can learn; create incentives for schools, teachers and administrators to help all students achieve long-term success; provide transparent information to parents, teachers and schools, empowering them with data to facilitate continuous improvement; empower parents to make informed choices; and hold all participants accountable to taxpayers.

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### HOLD SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE FOR HELPING ALL STUDENTS SUCCEED.

- Establish rigorous expectations for students and educators.
- Use clear and transparent descriptors of A, B, C, D and F to grade schools.
- Base A-F grades on objective, concise student learning outcome measures that balance student proficiency and learning growth to proficient and advanced achievement, with a specific focus on the lowest performing students.

#### REINVENT SCHOOL REPORT CARDS.

Web-based and easy-to-interpret school report cards can be a powerful online and mobile tool that empowers families by helping parents understand school data, make informed choices and engage with schools to discuss academic achievement.

# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

### POLICY IMPACT

STUDENT OUTCOMES, ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND PUBLIC OPINION SUPPORT A-F SCHOOL GRADING.

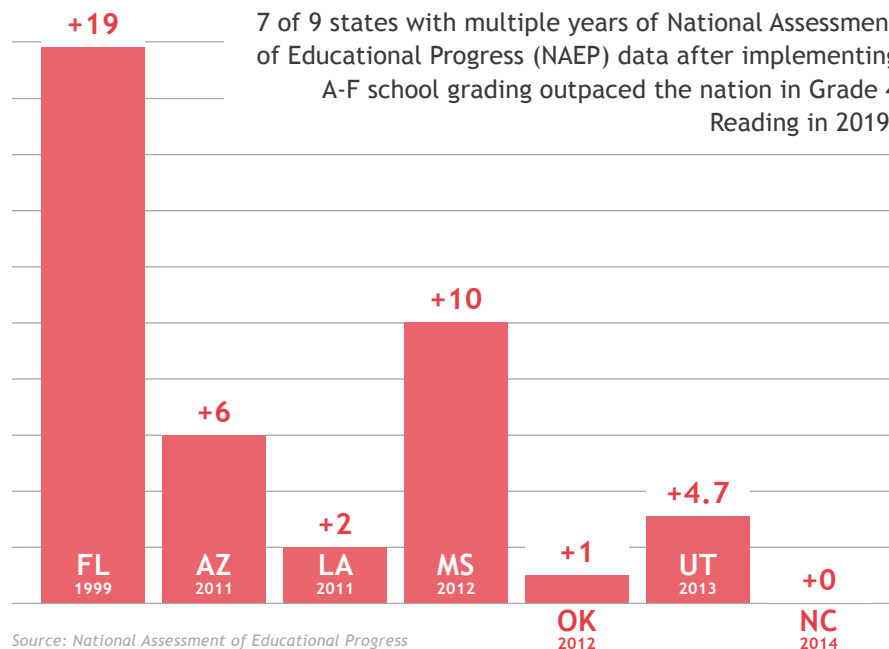
# 86%

#### SURVEY RESPONDENTS

support assigning schools a letter grade based on how well they educate students.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4TH GRADE READING IMPROVEMENT

7 of 9 states with multiple years of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data after implementing A-F school grading outpaced the nation in Grade 4 Reading in 2019.



### RESEARCH



#### FLORIDA

Schools facing accountability pressure changed their instructional practices in meaningful ways, which explained some of the test score gains in Florida's school grading system, per the American Economic Journal: Economic Policy.<sup>2</sup> While numerous studies have found that school accountability boosts test scores, evidence from a unique five-year, three-round survey of elementary schools in Florida reaffirmed that test score gains reflect genuine improvements.



#### NEW YORK CITY

Researchers at the Manhattan Institute<sup>3</sup> found positive, meaningful impacts continued six years after A-F was first adopted in NYC, but those ceased after A-F was repealed. The decision to stop reporting A-F summary letter grades removed an instrument that had led to positive changes at NYC's lowest-performing schools. Schools that would have earned an F in fall 2014—the first year of the system without A-F—showed no improvement relative to schools that would have earned higher grades.

<sup>1</sup> May 2014 National Survey Conducted by McLaughlin & Associates.

<sup>2</sup> [Feeling the Florida Heat? How Low-Performing Schools Respond to Voucher and Accountability Pressure](#). Cecilia Elena Rouse, Jane Hannaway, Dan Goldhaber and David Figlio. American Economic Journal: Economic Policy Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 2013), pp. 251-281.

<sup>3</sup> [Grading Schools Promotes Accountability and Improvement: Evidence from NYC](#), 2013-15, Marcus A. Winters. Education: PreK-12. Urban Policy EducationNYC. May 24, 2016.



# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

### RESOURCES

- [ExcelinEd School Accountability Resources](#)
- [ExcelinEd's A-F School Grading Fundamental Principles](#)
- [ExcelinEd A-F School Grading Communications Toolkit](#)
- [ExcelinEd Resources: Reinventing School Report Cards](#)



#### STATE SPOTLIGHT: FLORIDA

Rigorous accountability policy has Florida as a national leader on improving student learning. On the 2019 NAEP, Florida students outperformed their peers in every student subgroup in grades 4 and 8 Reading and grade 4 Mathematics.



# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: TEACHER SUPPORTS

We demand a great deal from America’s teachers. Besides family members, teachers are among the most important individuals helping students to succeed. The list of what we expect is long yet incredibly important: to help ensure all students reach high expectations through rigorous and engaging instruction; to employ science-based practices to teach all young students to read; to help overcome family and community challenges; to prepare today’s students to succeed in an ever-changing 21<sup>st</sup>-century world; and, increasingly, to help students develop durable skills—like grit, resilience and empathy—to better equip them for success.

### WHY FOCUS ON TEACHER SUPPORT STRATEGIES?

Teachers across all 50 states face mounting demands to provide students with an ever-widening range of opportunities and with deeper, more relevant preparation for college and career. Regrettably, state education systems fail to provide teachers with the comprehensive supports needed to meet these challenging demands. Compounding the problem are teacher shortages in many states, especially in critical subject areas and high-need communities.

- Between 2009 and 2014, the years of most recent available data, teacher education enrollments dropped from 691,000 to 451,000, a 35-percent reduction and a decrease of almost 240,000 teachers entering the classroom.
- Yet student enrollments are rising. The National Center for Education Statistics projects that the school-going population will increase by about 3 million students over the next 10 years.

Rather than supporting teachers and expanding opportunities for other talented individuals to enter the profession, existing policies in many states make it more difficult for schools to recruit, retain and develop a diverse pool of talented and content-rich teachers. This may be due to a lack of financial incentives, inflexible teacher certification policies, outdated teacher preparation programs and/or ineffective professional development opportunities.

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### CREATE ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS THAT REDUCE BARRIERS TO ENTRY, ALLOWING QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS TO ENTER THE TEACHING PROFESSION.

- Create “adjunct” certifications by which districts can issue local certification for part-time faculty, such as retired engineers or scientists.
- Attract talented individuals into the teaching profession by creating incentives, such as teacher scholarships.
- Create incentives to attract proven recruitment programs to the state, such as the [Relay Graduate School of Education](#) or [Teach for America](#).
- Support in-state colleges of education in providing innovative programs, such as the undergraduate certification pathway offered by [UTeach](#).
- Develop lower-cost and outcomes-based licensure and career ladder pathways through micro-credentialing.



# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: TEACHER SUPPORTS

### EXPAND EXISTING TEACHERS' CAPACITY TO HELP PREPARE ALL STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC AND CAREER SUCCESS.

- Improve state-supported professional development to ensure teachers are coached in the latest science of reading instruction and other research-based approaches to teaching and learning.
- Allow teachers to earn endorsements in specialty areas through micro-credentials, such as those offered by [Bloomboard](#) and [Digital Promise](#).
- Employ existing, high-quality professional development programs, such as [Code.org](#), to allow teachers to become trained/certified in computer science instruction.

### INCREASE TEACHER SALARIES BY DIFFERENTIATING PAY.

- Pay more to those teachers who teach the most at-risk students (e.g., students with special needs), those who teach in shortage subject areas (high school math and science), those who teach in more demanding school environments (e.g., low-performing schools and those in high-crime areas), and those who make great progress with students.
- Provide teacher leader and career ladder opportunities, such as those developed by Opportunity Culture; reward teachers who take on these roles so their compensation reflects both their workload and their prestige.

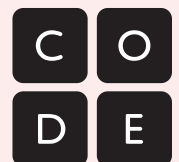
## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- Analysis of state law and regulations for teaching: [National Council on Teacher Quality, State Policy Yearbook \(2017\)](#).
- Alternative certification: [TNTP Teaching Fellows Program](#).
- Teacher and leader career ladders: [Extending the Reach of Excellent Teaching - "Introduction to Opportunity Culture."](#)
- Differentiating pay: [U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences Evaluation Report on Federal Teacher Incentive Fund \(2017\)](#).



### PARTNER HIGHLIGHT: CODE.ORG

You don't have to be a software developer to teach computer science. More than one million teachers have brought CS to their students using Code.org. Code.org's goal to expand student access to computer science instruction includes resources and strategies for upskilling current teachers. These are described in [Recommendations for States Developing Computer Science Teacher Pathways](#). Across the nation, [30 states](#) allocate funding for rigorous computer science teacher professional learning and course support.





# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: EDUCATION FUNDING

In states across the country, funding for schools is stuck in an industrial model, focused on “inputs” and specific instructional models that no longer work for most students. By *changing the way funding is structured*—and enhancing its transparency to the public—state leaders can enable districts and schools to improve and innovate on behalf of students.

### WHY IS EDUCATION FUNDING REFORM NEEDED?

Too often, debates about state education funding focus solely on how much money should be provided to school districts. Far too little attention is paid to an equally or even more important question: *How can your state maximize the impact of existing funding?*

Currently, the way states fund districts is so complex that only a handful of people in any state understand it. District leaders are hamstrung by a multitude of restrictions that lock in antiquated instructional models, preventing them from addressing the unique needs of their students, even when there’s a strong desire to do so. The funding amount a district receives is not tied to the number of students it serves or the students’ special needs or disadvantages. And in most states, funding is completely disconnected from school performance as well. In fact, the only way school districts can grow their budget is to raise local taxes.

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### IMPLEMENT STUDENT-CENTERED FUNDING.

Also referred to as weighted student funding, student-based allocation or student-based budgeting, student-centered funding means:

- 1 nearly all funding is provided to districts based on how many students they serve;
- 2 funds are also provided to address specific needs and challenges those students might have; and
- 3 funding for each student follows him or her to any district to ensure his or her needs can be met, regardless of district boundaries.

When compared to the current systems of big blocks of funding trapped in specific services or programs, student-centered funding is more transparent; it empowers district leaders to use funds to meet the unique needs of their students; it empowers parents to choose the district that is best for their children (with the money following their child); and it’s fairer because all students get the same base resources, with additional funding for students with special needs or disadvantages.

#### MAXIMIZE FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY.

Through legislation and executive action, state leaders can promote financial transparency by requiring districts to report, for each school, actual revenue and expenditures per student, including how much they are spending on key instructional activities. Through a web portal, state leaders can enable schools to identify comparable schools and learn from them.

Financial transparency, particularly at the school level, is critical to the success of student-centered funding. It promotes more effective and efficient use of resources by enabling school leaders to identify comparable schools that are getting better student outcomes with the same or less funding. Transparency also promotes student opportunity by empowering parents with information on how much funding a school is receiving per student.





# Close Learning Gaps

## POLICY: EDUCATION FUNDING

### ADD IN PERFORMANCE FUNDING.

Funding for schools is currently based on inputs, regardless of how well schools are performing and serving students.

But performance funding in K-12 education can incentivize results. Examples include rewarding schools when they succeed with at-risk student populations or when their graduates get a decent paying job, succeed in college or enlist in the military.

Performance funding can be effective for two main reasons:

- It makes better sense to pay for what really matters, specifically, outcomes in terms of student performance and success, as opposed to inputs like seat-time. Indeed, there is broad agreement that linking payment to performance creates an incentive for better performance. This, in fact, has happened in higher education and other industries.
- The focus on outcomes allows policymakers to worry less about the inputs, like the number of hours of instruction or class size. As a result, districts are free to innovate.

### STATE SPOTLIGHTS: FLORIDA, CALIFORNIA, COLORADO AND TEXAS



**Florida** has a relatively simple funding formula, almost 90 percent of which is student-centered. Nearly all local funds are student-centered, as they are incorporated into the funding formula and adjusted for student enrollment.



**California** collapsed more than 50 separate funding programs into one, student-centered formula.



**Colorado** passed bipartisan legislation that creates a [financial transparency website](#) for schools.



**Texas** provides substantial bonuses to districts when their students graduate college, career or military ready. Importantly, districts receive substantially more when they succeed with economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. The state also has a [financial transparency website](#) that allows schools to easily find comparable schools that are getting better results with the same or fewer resources. This information is also useful to policymakers, local leaders and parents.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- [ExcelinEd How-to Guide for State Policymakers: Student-Centered State Funding](#)
- [ExcelinEd Model Policy: School Level Financial Transparency Act](#)
- [ExcelinEd Issue Brief & Modeling Tool: Performance Funding](#)



# Bridge the Digital Divide

ENSURING EVERY STUDENT HAS EQUITABLE  
ACCESS TO THE DIGITAL SUPERHIGHWAY



## POLICY: DIGITAL ACCESS AND EQUITY

In the age of technology, broadband connectivity and digital devices are essential and integral tools for the workplace, health care, transportation and almost every aspect of life. The same is true for education. But, without devices and connectivity, educators and students face a losing battle for accessing, delivering and participating in a meaningful digital learning experience. To achieve success in a 21st-century learning environment, all students urgently need basic devices and access to the Internet.

### WHY FOCUS ON THE DIGITAL DIVIDE?

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics and USAFacts show that:

**14%**

**OF CHILDREN AGES 3-18**  
have no internet access at home.

**17%**

**OF CHILDREN AGES 3-18**  
live in households without a laptop  
or desktop computer.

**34%**

**OF FAMILIES**  
surveyed reported not having  
internet because they were  
unable to afford it.

After the pandemic experience that left schools shuttered and millions of students without computers for online learning, policymakers and practitioners know that learning can—and must—be enabled both inside and outside of the traditional classroom setting. Without question, bridging the digital divide is a pivotal step in ensuring all students have equitable access to a quality education.



# Bridge the Digital Divide

## POLICY: DIGITAL ACCESS AND EQUITY

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### EXPAND BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY & DIGITAL DEVICE ACCESS.

- Assess student, family and educator needs.
- Coordinate local, state and federal broadband programs and initiatives.
- Adopt 1:1 digital device and connectivity policies with priority determined by student and educator need (e.g., socioeconomic status, geographic needs and/or alternative learning needs) for devices and services.

#### PRIORITIZE DIGITAL LITERACY & GROW DIGITAL LEARNING RESOURCES.

- Adopt statewide digital literacy standards.
- Provide comprehensive educator professional development.
- Partner with high-quality, evidence-based providers to train teachers or provide resources to support remote instruction for students with disabilities or English learners.
- Offer digital skills training for students, parents and families.
- Create online digital learning repositories.
- Build statewide learning management system infrastructure.
- Provide learning continuity guidance to school districts.

#### DEDICATE, PRIORITIZE & MAXIMIZE FUNDING.

- Prioritize all funding based on greatest need.
- Maximize use of federal programs and funding.
- Leverage public-private partnerships.
- Invest in educator career advancement opportunities.

#### SUPPORT DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION & ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY.

- Develop a statewide digital equity plan.
- Regularly assess student, family and educator needs.
- Establish a streamlined bidding process for district broadband services.
- Provide flexibility to adapt to new technology.
- Expand workforce training programs aligned to state broadband employment goals.

No single solution, policy or process will bridge the digital divide. These strategies are not designed as steps in a process, but instead as part of the larger digital equity ecosystem. States can use these strategies to build upon existing policies, create new initiatives and more.

### POLICY IMPACT

State policymakers have an opportunity to partner with education providers, communities and private corporations to target the need for bandwidth, Wi-Fi hotspots and devices for families who cannot afford them, so that every student is able to learn and every teacher is able to teach in a virtual environment. And several states are doing just that:

- **Connecticut's** \$43.5 million [Everybody Learns Initiative](#) makes it the first in the nation to ensure every PK-12 student in need has access to a learning device and a reliable, at-home internet connection (estimated to support access to 82,000 laptops and 44,000 at-home internet connections).
- **Alabama** invested \$100 million in CARES Act funds through a public-private partnership to ensure access to internet connectivity for over 200,000 high-needs K-12 students through the [Alabama Broadband Connectivity](#) (ABC) program.
- The **Mississippi** Legislature allocated \$200 million for [Mississippi Connects](#) to ensure that every student receives the technology needed to learn at school and at home.



# Bridge the Digital Divide

## POLICY: DIGITAL ACCESS AND EQUITY



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: TEXAS

Without the option of an online delivery platform or learning management system (LMS), many schools still have no way of engaging students in meaningful distance learning - even when families have access to devices and Wi-Fi. Texas funded an initiative that provides all Texas school systems with a free, voluntary and high-quality [Learning Management Platform](#) (used to track progress, store grades, interact with teachers and parents, provide synchronous and asynchronous resources, and more) for two years, which is now being used by 1 in 5 students.



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: VIRGINIA

In concert with the state education agency, states can provide competitive grants for proven providers to offer teachers the professional learning they need to provide high-quality distance learning and used to establish and meet state digital literacy standards and goals for educators and students. Virginia is hosting the [Virtual Virginia](#) platform and offering professional learning in blended content for Virginia teachers interested in learning online teaching methods and pedagogy.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

### EXCELIN/ED RESOURCES:

- [ExcelinEd Model Policy: Digital Devices for All Act](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: Achieving K-12 Broadband Goals Using a State RFI](#)
- [ExcelinEd Model Policy: Digital Access Survey Act](#)
- [State Solutions Policy Brief: Closing the Homework Gap](#)
- [ExcelinEd Model Policy: K-12 Connectivity Grant Fund](#)
- [Sustaining the Emergency Connectivity Fund](#)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning](#). Common Sense Media
- [Connect All Students: How States and School Districts Can Close the Digital Divide](#). Common Sense Media
- [Looking Back, Looking Forward: What It Will Take to Permanently Close the K-12 Digital Divide](#). Common Sense Media
- [Restarting and Reinventing Schools: Learning in the Time of COVID & Beyond](#). Learning Policy Institute.
- [Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning: State Policies and Actions](#). Council of Chief State School Officers.
- [Home Digital Access Data Collection: Blueprint for State Educational Leaders](#). Council of Chief State School Officers.
- [How States Are Expanding Broadband Research](#). Pew Charitable Trusts.
- [Teaching Our Way to Digital Equity](#). ASCD.
- [Teachers Perceptions of Inequities in Students' Internet Access and Participation in Remote Learning](#). RAND.
- [Supporting K-12 and Postsecondary Virtual Learning Environments](#). National Governors Association.



# Empower Families with Opportunity

PROVIDING FAMILIES WITH ACCESS TO THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT BEST FITS THEIR CHILD'S NEEDS



## POLICY: PUBLIC EDUCATION CHOICE—CHARTER SCHOOLS

Every child deserves access to a quality education that provides knowledge and skills necessary for a successful career and fulfilling life. Unfortunately, many children are assigned to schools that don't fit their individual needs, and parents' options are limited to moving to a new community with a different school, which simply isn't feasible for many working families in America.

An effective way to improve education opportunities is by expanding access for families to high-quality public charter schools.

### WHY EXPAND ACCESS TO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS?

#### PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS CAN OPERATE WITH ENHANCED FLEXIBILITY.

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools that have enhanced flexibility to meet the unique needs of their students. Instead of being run directly by a school district, charter schools operate under a performance contract with a district, state or other approved entity.

#### DEMAND FOR SEATS IN HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOLS IS ON THE RISE.

Enrollment in public charter schools has tripled since 2005. Today, about 3.3 million students are enrolled in 7,500 charter schools across 44 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and Guam.

Yet at least 2 million more students would enroll in a public charter school if they could, according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.





# Empower Families with Opportunity





## POLICY: CHARTER SCHOOLS

### PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES WANT HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOL OPTIONS.

- Charter schools help meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, giving children access to a better educational “fit.” Through charter schools, states can: create unique learning environments for college and career readiness, such as a specific focus on STEM education, the arts or language immersion; provide flexibility to struggling students; offer unique teaching styles, such as project-based learning or classical education; and offer new high-quality options to students otherwise assigned to a low-performing neighborhood school.
- Charter schools also empower communities to create new public schools to address previously unmet needs for local families. For example, [two moms in New York City](#) founded the [NYC Autism Charter School](#) to provide high-quality education to students with autism—at no cost. These two parents are not alone. Similar stories can be found all over the country, reminding us that real people start charter schools to address real challenges.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

### STEPS THAT CAN EXPEDITE EXPANSION OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS TO MEET GROWING PARENT AND STUDENT DEMAND:

 FACILITIES	Ensure that charter schools have access to public school facilities or sufficient financing that would allow them an equivalent facility. <b>Example:</b> <i>Texas’s Permanent School Fund can decrease the cost of bond financing for charters by ten percent.</i>
 FUNDING	Champion equitable funding to ensure that public dollars follow students regardless of which school they attend. <b>Example:</b> <i>Colorado passed a bipartisan bill (HB17 - 1375) that provided charters access to local funding sources.</i>
 AUTHORIZING	In addition to local school boards, encourage the empowerment of new authorities, like public universities, to grant and oversee charters. <b>Example:</b> <i>The Mayor of Indianapolis may directly authorize charter schools.</i>
 TALENT	Whether through grants or through policy, encourage great educators to start new and different schools. <b>Example:</b> <i>States could invest in programs like 4.0 Schools in New Orleans, which teaches and supports fellows to design new schools. Similar programs include <b>Building Excellent Schools</b> in Boston, and the <b>NACA Inspired Schools Network</b> in Albuquerque.</i>

### STATES CAN BETTER MEET CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITY NEEDS.

Funding and access to affordable facilities is a major obstacle to the growth of charter schools, creating long waiting lists of parents eager to find a better school choice for their children. States can better meet charter school facility needs through a variety of policies, including direct payments to help charter schools pay for rent, no- or low-cost access to surplus district buildings and affordable financing to buy a building.

- **STEP 1:** Understand how well the state’s current policies are meeting charter school facilities needs using ExcelinEd’s [Charter School Facility Index](#). Indiana and Ohio used the Index to significantly improve their policies.
- **STEP 2:** Reduce the cost of charter schools borrowing to buy or build their own facilities by formally or informally backing the bonds used to finance their purchases. There is no better return on investment, as the cost to a state is quite small in comparison to the many millions of dollars saved by charter schools paying less in interest and fees.





# Empower Families with Opportunity

## POLICY: CHARTER SCHOOLS



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: FLORIDA

To bring more high-impact charters to the Sunshine State, legislation was passed in 2017 to recruit the nation's most effective charter schools to serve students in persistently low-performing school zones.

These “Schools of Hope” are charter schools that meet specific criteria. Each school must:

- 1 serve students from one or more persistently low-performing schools,
- 2 be located in the attendance zone of a persistently low-performing school or within a five-mile radius; and
- 3 be a Title I school.

To qualify, a Hope Operator is a nonprofit charter management organization that operates three or more charter schools with a record of successfully serving students from low-income families. Florida currently has five approved Hope Operators: Democracy Prep Public Schools, IDEA Public Schools, KIPP New Jersey, Mater Academy and Somerset Academy.

Because of their proven record of success, these operators have access to start-up funds, are exempt from certain fees and taxes and have a streamlined process to expand and grow.

[Senate Bill 1028](#), signed into law in the 2021 legislative session, will continue expediting the opening of some 50 high-quality schools within the next five years to serve as many as 48,000 students. The legislation also increases access to state capital outlay funds in a school's first year of operation.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: The Case for Public Charter Schools: Ten Studies and Data Sets for Policymakers](#)
- [ExcelinEd & Texas Public Foundation Policy Case Study: Time to Change Course: Reclaiming the Potential of Texas Charter Schools](#)
- [ExcelinEd & NAPCS Survey: How to Recruit High-Performing Charter Management Organizations to a New Region](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: Addressing Charter School Facility Needs: Actions for States](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: Building for Success: How States Can Address Charter School Facility Needs](#)
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: [Voting with Their Feet: A State-level Analysis of Public Charter School and District Public School Enrollment Trends](#)



# Empower Families with Opportunity

## POLICY: PUBLIC EDUCATION CHOICE—OPEN ENROLLMENT

In addition to public education choice policies that can help expand access to charter schools, policymakers can consider further expanding public school choice through open enrollment policies. Open enrollment provides the flexibility for students to attend public schools—either full time or part time—outside of their residentially assigned attendance zone. Forty-six states, plus Washington, D.C., have open enrollment policies.

### WHY FOCUS ON OPEN ENROLLMENT?

School boundaries are lines designed to contain and control the mobility of students. A recent report from the Urban Institute, [Dividing Lines: How School Districts Draw Attendance Boundaries to Perpetuate School Segregation](#), clearly indicates that these lines are drawn to maintain the exclusivity of certain public schools, specifically serving families who buy more costly real estate and pay tuition in the form of property taxes.

Policies that focus on educational opportunity and student success do not have boundaries. Instead, they break down outdated practices that restrict students to certain school zones, require certain enrollment qualifications and deny flexible access to public classrooms. Policymakers can expand opportunity in public education with several approaches to open enrollment.

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### VOLUNTARY VS. MANDATORY OPEN ENROLLMENT

Open enrollment may be voluntary or mandatory at the state or district level. Voluntary policies allow schools or districts to decide if they will accept students who live outside their boundaries. Mandatory policies require all districts to provide students the option to transfer and to accept students who request transfer. Restrictions on mandatory policies may include opt-out provisions, priorities for allowing transfer or desegregation provisions.

#### INTRA-DISTRICT VS. INTER-DISTRICT ENROLLMENT

Intra-district policies allow a student to request admission to a school outside their residentially assigned attendance zone within the same district. Inter-district policies allow students to apply to schools across district boundaries within the same state.

#### PART-TIME ENROLLMENT

With a part-time enrollment policy, students can access the courses they need from a provider that makes the most sense, parents have an increased amount of flexibility, and districts could see a funding boost while strengthening partnerships with community organizations.

- Parents can enroll their students in any public school in the state for up to 50% of the day.
- Students who are part-time enrolled could be enrolled in another public school, private school, online school, or home education program.
- Districts can count the students in their enrollment numbers, which means districts would receive funding for part-time enrolled students.



# Empower Families with Opportunity

## POLICY: OPEN ENROLLMENT

- Districts could teach part-time enrolled students in different locations, on-campus or at other locations approved by the district.
- Districts can contract for educational services on behalf of part-time enrolled students, which means students could enroll in community college classes paid for by the district (if the district approves).

At least 12 states allow students to enroll part time in public schools, addressing the topic explicitly in statute. Eight of those states require that districts offer part-time enrollment to students, while nine provide districts with the discretion to create local policy guidance. Six states treat part-time enrollment as a student right.



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: OKLAHOMA

Since 1999, Oklahoma has had an open transfer policy in its public education system. During the 2021 legislative session, Oklahoma lawmakers rewrote the policy, making it significantly more student-centered and transparent. The new law requires the state to assess each school district's enrollment capacity and requires districts to publish their transfer policies. Clear data and accessible information empower parents to advocate for their children.

Additionally, active-duty military parents can enroll their child in any public school, regardless of residency.



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: LOUISIANA

Louisiana also took steps in 2021 to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and improve its open enrollment policy. Previously, eligible Louisiana parents could cross district boundaries to enroll their children in any public school, but if those requests were denied, parents had limited ability to appeal the decision.

House Bill 211 improved the state's open enrollment policy with the following provisions:

- Helps parents find the best fit for their child by streamlining open enrollment appeals and clarifying their rights in pursuing this educational option.
- Allows parents to appeal to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) if the district denies their enrollment request.
- Requires BESE to pursue financial incentives for districts that accept and support transfer students.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- [ExcelinEd Model Policy: Part-Time Enrollment](#)
- [ExcelinEd Model Policy: Open Districts](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Analysis: Part-Time Enrollment](#)



# Empower Families with Opportunity

## POLICY: PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE

A proven, effective method to deliver more educational options to students and families is private education choice. Tax-credit scholarships, education scholarship accounts and vouchers are effective tools that are connecting families with new options. Today, [more than 600,000 students](#) are enrolled in more than 65 such private education choice programs across 29 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

Demand for choice rose dramatically in 2020 as schools across the country closed their doors and families struggled to keep children learning. Yet even before the pandemic's disruptions, far too many students were assigned to schools ill-fitted to their learning needs.

According to an August 2020 survey, more than two-thirds of parents supported the concept of educational choice—but options for most families remain limited. While more than two dozen states now offer certain disadvantaged students a private alternative to a neighborhood school, less than 1 percent of the 50.8 million K-12 students nationwide actually have access to a private choice program.

### WHY FOCUS ON PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE?

Every student is unique and wonderful in their own way. Private school choice enables more families to find the right school for their child, rather than limiting a child's education based solely on their family's income or the ZIP code where they live.

Some states focus on offering private education choice to all students, while others opt to focus on particular groups of students like [students with special needs](#), [students from low-income or working-class families](#), [victims of bullying](#), [foster children](#) and [children of military or veterans](#).

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

Three main policy solutions empower families with private education choice.



#### EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS (ESAs)

ESAs are flexible spending accounts funded by the state and controlled by parents. With an ESA, parents can customize and direct funds to a combination of approved uses, such as tutoring, therapy for students with disabilities, instructional materials/curriculum, online programs, private school tuition, contracted services with school districts, exam fees and savings for future education expenses, among others.



#### TAX-CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS

To provide for tax-credit scholarships, businesses and individuals make voluntary donations to nonprofit organizations that award private school scholarships to eligible students. In return, businesses and individuals receive a state tax credit.



# Empower Families with Opportunity

## POLICY: PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE



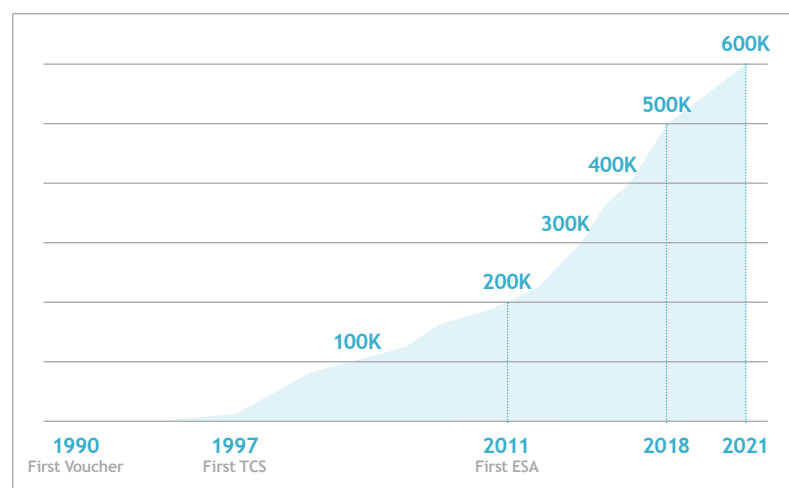
### VOUCHERS

Vouchers are state-funded coupons that parents redeem at private schools for tuition. Vouchers were the first form of private education choice, originally enacted in 1990 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Today, most private choice advocates favor ESAs, rather than vouchers, due to their flexibility and customization.

## POLICY IMPACT

### PRIVATE CHOICE ENROLLMENT

By 2021, more than **600,000 students** were enrolled in private choice programs.



### RESEARCH HAS FOUND THAT PROVIDING GREATER OPPORTUNITY THROUGH PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE HAS DEMONSTRATED BENEFITS:

- Improved academic outcomes for scholarship recipients.
- Improved academic outcomes for students who remain in public schools.
- Increased civic knowledge and engagement for scholarship recipients.
- Improved racial diversity.
- Financial savings to state taxpayers.
- [Higher state-level performance](#) on NAEP.



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: FLORIDA

The Sunshine State offers students and families more school choice options than any other state in the nation. Notably, more than 1.2 million low-income students are eligible for Florida's K-12 scholarship offerings.

The Florida legislature took significant steps in 2021 to expand the state's private choice options through the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program. With priority eligibility for low-income students, the scholarship program now allows a family of four earning less than \$100,000 to receive full funding of K-12 education costs at a school of their choice. Eligibility for scholarships was also increased for students with unique abilities (with more and larger scholarships), and eligibility was added for students of parents serving in the military and students who are in foster care or adopted. Funding for the program was brought into the state's general education financing system to ensure scholarship stability.

The previous year when the pandemic arrived, Florida allocated \$15 million in CARES Act Safety Net funds to create private school stabilization grants for schools where more than 50% of the student body relied on school choice scholarships. State leaders also added \$42 million in scholarship funding that year to serve 4,000 additional special needs students and expanded scholarship eligibility for low-income families to serve more than 28,000 students.



# Empower Families with Opportunity

## POLICY: PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: INDIANA

The Hoosier State recently ranked second on the School Choice Demonstration Project's Education Freedom Index, which "measures the availability and accessibility of private, charter, homeschool, and public school choice across the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia." This ranking is not without merit as Indiana is a model educational environment with tax-credit scholarships, vouchers and a newly established education scholarship account program for parents and students to exercise their schooling preferences.

In the 2019-2020 school year, nearly 50,000 of Indiana's students attended a school other than the one they were residentially assigned. That means tens of thousands of students are selecting schools through tax-credit scholarships and vouchers. [Thirteen percent](#) of Indiana students are eligible for the state's new ESA.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

### EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS:

- [ExcelinEd Policy Overview](#)
- [ExcelinEd Model Policy](#)
- Informational Video: [What Are Education Scholarship Accounts?](#)

### TAX-CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS:

- [ExcelinEd Policy Overview](#)
- [ExcelinEd Model Policy](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Design Considerations](#)
- [Policy Analysis: The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program](#)
- Informational Video: [How are tax-credit scholarship programs designed?](#)

### ADDITIONAL EXCELINED RESOURCES:

- [Private Education Choice Research Overview](#)
- [Federal Law and Scholarships for Students with Special Needs](#)
- Informational Video: [What is Private School Choice?](#)





# Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

SUPPORTING EVERY STUDENT IN GAINING  
IN-DEMAND SKILLS FOR LIFELONG SUCCESS



## POLICY: EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

Too many of our nation's students are unprepared for what they will face after high school. To compete for jobs, they will need postsecondary credentials—either a college degree or technical skills and certifications, or both. In fact, 60 percent of the nation's fastest-growing jobs require postsecondary work. The challenge for states is to prepare K-12 students to advance successfully into college and career. Currently, nearly 2 million first-year college students need remedial help. Others lack access to career and technical training aligned with higher-skill, higher-wage, in-demand jobs, diminishing their ability to rise and achieve.

## WHY FOCUS ON EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS?

ExcelinEd developed [Pathways Matters](#) to help state leaders tackle important education-to-workforce issues. State policy is a critical lever for ensuring all learners—regardless of age—have access to education-to-workforce pathways that lead to higher-skill, higher-demand and middle- to high-wage careers. Learner success requires pathways to align with in-demand occupations and include advancement opportunities.

Policymakers can address gaps within their existing programs and policies to strengthen the full ecosystem of policies across the K-12, postsecondary and workplace continuum. States can deliver learner success and create vibrant local, regional and state economies by creating a comprehensive approach, rather than developing policies in isolation.



# Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

## POLICY: EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### LEARNER PATHWAYS

Ensure vertical alignment to workforce needs, robust funding and collaboration across agencies and equitable access for all students.

- High-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs:
  - Align all CTE programs with higher-demand, higher-skill and higher-wage occupations that reflect the state's economic and workforce priorities.
  - Ensure that these programs feature the academic and technical skills and knowledge learners will need to be successful.
- Targeted CTE program funding:
  - Dedicate state funding for CTE programs—but only if they are aligned to higher-demand, higher-skill and higher-wage occupations.
  - Target specific funds for pathway completion and demonstrated learner outcomes.
- Audit for quality and equity:
  - Conduct a biennial audit of CTE programs for quality and equity to ensure that all learners have access to higher-demand, higher-skill and higher-wage pathways.
  - Collect school- and student-level data to evaluate outcomes of CTE programs against established shared metrics for quality and equity.
- State cross-agency shared priorities:
  - Establish shared priorities and collective accountability across state agencies and education systems for learner pathway development, supports and success.
  - Ensure that business and industry have a seat at the table and can lead discussions related to demand and training requirements.

#### POSTSECONDARY ACCELERATION

Streamline postsecondary learning and empower high school students to earn credit to reduce the time required to earn postsecondary degrees.

- College acceleration:
  - Provide and incentivize a range of options for learners to earn college credit while in high school.
  - Ensure that all learners have access and financial support to accelerate their journey to a postsecondary credential.
- Credit for prior learning and credentials:
  - Implement a consistent state policy for awarding postsecondary program or elective credit for prior learning, work experience and earned industry credentials.
- College articulation agreements:
  - Establish statewide articulation agreements to ensure college credits earned in K-12 or at one institution transfer and count toward a degree at another.
  - Minimize or eliminate credit loss and misalignment for transitioning learners.
- Remediation:
  - Replace outdated developmental and remedial education with college credit-bearing options paired with intensive supports.
  - Adopt co-requisite remediation programs or offer remediation to learners before they graduate high school.



# Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

## POLICY: EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: IDAHO

Idaho provides robust funding for college acceleration opportunities. Through the Advanced Opportunities program Idaho provides \$4,125 per student for 7th through 12th grade for students to use for advanced coursework, including dual credit courses, overload courses, postsecondary credit-bearing examination fees for courses like AP, IB, CLEP, industry credentials, and CTE workforce training courses. Idaho additionally provides an incentive to learners who earn postsecondary credit through a postsecondary scholarship. Learners who earn at least 10 postsecondary credit hours receive \$1,800, creditable toward an eligible postsecondary institution. The postsecondary credit scholarship increases to \$4,000 for 20 postsecondary semester credits and \$8,000 for earning an associate degree.

### POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT

Reduce barriers such as funding, lack of alignment and missed opportunities to help more students attain postsecondary credentials.

- Reverse transfer credentials:
  - Establish a statewide policy to allow students to earn an associate degree while continuing to work toward a bachelor's degree.
  - Ensure that two-year and four-year college credits can be combined toward the credential.
- Last dollar/last mile financial aid:
  - Provide dedicated state financial aid to qualifying learners that fills in gaps in federal assistance (last dollar) and promotes attainment for learners just shy of completing a degree (last mile).
- Outcomes-based funding:
  - Transition postsecondary funding models from those based on learner enrollment to ones based on learner outcomes.
  - Dedicate more funding to programs and institutions that show demonstrated success in meeting metrics such as job placement and long-term wage earnings.
- Stackable credentials:
  - Define and promote a combination of industry and academic credentials that reflect articulated pathways to advanced learning and employment.
  - Ensure that postsecondary credential programs are widely accessible to all learners and reflect value in the labor market.



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: INDIANA

In early 2017, the Indiana General Assembly charged the Commission for Higher Education to “study and make recommendations regarding the benefits of a reverse transfer policy for Indiana students.” As a result, one of the state’s main community/technical colleges, Ivy Tech, developed a structured process for learners to apply for reverse transfer degrees. To make this possible, Ivy Tech established agreements with all public four-year colleges and universities in the state, as well as many private institutions. Vincennes University has similar agreements in place. In December 2020, Ivy Tech reached a milestone of awarding 1,000 credentials through reverse transfer.



# Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

## POLICY: EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

### WORKFORCE READINESS

Ensure the skills, credentials and apprenticeships students pursue help to prepare a strong workforce within the state.

- Work-based learning:
  - Establish a statewide K-12 and postsecondary work-based learning program that promotes learning through a series of progressive learner experiences both in the classroom and in a work setting.
  - Provide guidance and support for how education and business and industry collaborate to achieve mutual priorities.
- Registered apprenticeships:
  - Establish clearly defined program guidance for state-promoted registered apprenticeships and apprentice programs outlining prerequisites, requirements, funding, stakeholder incentives and participant outcomes.
- Industry credentials:
  - Ensure all industry credentials earned in K-12 or postsecondary are aligned with higher-demand, higher-skill, higher-wage occupations and valued by state and regional employers.
- Skills retraining/credentialing:
  - Identify and promote non-degree programs and credentials that support new, transitioning and displaced learners in career change and advancement.
  - Ensure that supports include funding for learners and incentives for participating employers who train or retrain them.

### EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Incentivize workforce engagement in student pathways and reduce the barriers that keep employers from participating.

- Industry engagement incentives:
  - Establish, sustain and promote a comprehensive set of industry and employer engagement incentives for supporting education-to-workforce pathways. Incentives may include grant funds, tax credits or local and regional support services.
- Legal barriers:
  - Remove or lessen legal barriers such as liability insurance, workers' compensation and worksite age restrictions to provide more learners with work-based learning opportunities.

### CONTINUUM ALIGNMENT AND QUALITY INDICATORS

Ensure cross-sector agreement on outcomes, strategies to get there and data to track progress.

- Shared program quality definitions and indicators:
  - Establish shared statewide definitions and indicators for quality of and success in education-to-workforce pathways.
  - Ensure these shared priorities extend across agencies and systems and inform decisions about program offerings, funding and outcomes.
- State longitudinal data system:
  - Ensure the state's cross-agency data system collects and reports on data needed to evaluate education-to-workforce programs against shared metrics for quality and success.
  - Data should span agencies and education systems and into the workforce to inform decision-making and drive outcomes.



# Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

## POLICY: EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

CO

### STATE SPOTLIGHT: COLORADO

Colorado has a high level of coordination across state agencies and other institutions to support pathway development, much of this facilitated by the Colorado Workforce Development Council. This collaboration is supported at the local level through partnerships among K-12 schools and districts, community colleges and business/industry.

The Council is governor-appointed and was formed under the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998. It focuses on three core strategies to support education-to-workforce efforts:

- 1 industry-led public-private partnerships, intermediaries and boards;
- 2 development of career pathways; and
- 3 promoting a continuum of work-based learning activities.

The Council is charged with developing and overseeing the state's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act plan and funding.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

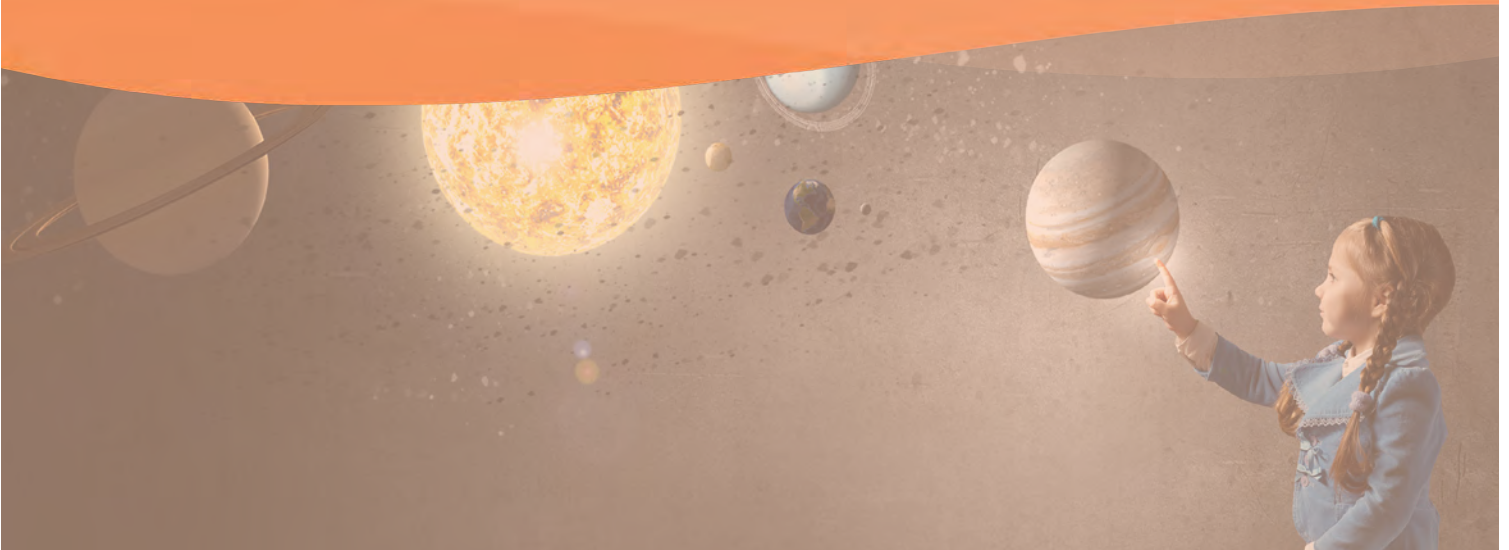
ExcelinEd offers actionable resources for states as they work to address the skills, equity and access gaps on behalf of students. Additional research, resources and model policies are available on our [Pathways Matter](#) and [College & Career Pathways](#) websites.

- [ExcelinEd's Pathways Matter Policies](#)
- [ExcelinEd's Career and Technical Education Playbook Series](#)
- [ExcelinEd's College Acceleration Policies and Playbook Series](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: Incentivizing Districts to Provide Course Access](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: College and Career Pathways: Equity and Access](#)



# Reimagine Learning

TRANSFORMING THE WHEN, WHERE AND HOW  
OF EDUCATION TO INDIVIDUALIZE LEARNING



## POLICY: ALTERNATIVE LEARNING MODELS

America's conventional, one-size-fits-all education system anchored in the industrial age leaves too many students unengaged and disconnected. High school graduation rates are at an all-time high, but students aren't necessarily ready for what's next. This reality reveals that something isn't quite right with how traditional K-12 education engages and prepares students. 2020's pandemic underscored that now, more than ever, education must be reimaged. Parents want normalcy—but not a return to normal. It's time to rethink education, including flexible paths to academic mastery, credit for work experience and allowing students to learn anywhere.

### WHY ARE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING MODELS NEEDED?

From delivery and pace to place and path, alternative learning models have become a necessity for a high-functioning, 21st-century education system. Every student has unique talents and abilities, and every student deserves an education that adapts to their needs rather than requiring conformity to an outdated model of education. Schools and educators must put students at the center of learning, helping students master necessary knowledge and skills and cultivating valuable and relevant experiences. By creating policy conditions that allow schools and classrooms to innovate, states can ensure all students graduate equipped to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Innovative, student-centered strategies—such as personalized learning and competency-based education—focus on students' mastery of knowledge and skills rather than an academic calendar or seat-time requirements.





# Reimagine Learning

## POLICY: ALTERNATIVE LEARNING MODELS

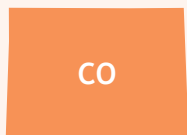
### POLICY SOLUTIONS

#### LAUNCH INNOVATION OR PILOT PROGRAMS.

State innovation and pilot programs support the incubation and scaling of alternative education models aligned to 21st-century demands. A strong program should be anchored by a [new vision for graduates](#) with support not only from district teachers and leaders but also from local communities, business, industry and higher education leaders.

Pilot programs encourage schools to develop a specific innovative learning model within state-established parameters. General innovation programs, in contrast, are typically broader in scope and can take many forms. States may create innovation zones, provide innovation-focused grants or offer official innovation school/district designations.

Both approaches allow for new models to develop and thrive. Further, they empower districts and schools to apply for flexibility from state statutes or regulations that may impede implementation. The best approach depends on individual circumstances in a state. Where innovative schools are already thriving, states can create a formal in-state network for leaders to collaborate and share resources and lessons learned.



#### STATE SPOTLIGHT: COLORADO

State law provides specific guidelines for schools to participate in an [innovative education program](#) (Section 22-32.5-101 through 22-32.5-111).

#### CLEAR AWAY UNNECESSARY POLICY OBSTACLES & PROVIDE MECHANISMS FOR FLEXIBILITY.

State policies often create obstacles to innovation at the school level as a result of funding, assessment and reporting requirements that constrain schools in traditional paradigms. In their applications to use innovation programs, schools can identify—and request flexibility waivers from—state laws or regulations that hinder their ability to implement a specific model or to improve practices that could benefit student achievement.

Policymakers can take the following steps to clear barriers to innovation:

- 1 Align Higher Education Requirements.** Nontraditional report cards and transcripts can place high school graduates at a disadvantage when applying for college admission, financial aid and scholarships. States can amend higher education policies to accommodate innovative models. They also can design appropriate accommodations for state data system requirements.
- 2 Provide Assessment Flexibility.** Conventional once-a-year evaluation of student proficiency on grade-level standards conflicts with the desire to break free of the traditional paradigms of time, place and pace. States can explore opportunities to implement flexible testing windows and maximize flexibility provided under federal law.
- 3 Dismantle Outdated Seat-Time Requirements.** States can begin with a review of approved flexibility requests and/or waivers of seat-time to examine the replacement proposals and their success. Policymakers can also conduct a thorough statutory and regulatory audit to determine the many implications of seat time-based policies.



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### STATE SPOTLIGHT: IDAHO

State law outlines steps for transitioning to mastery-based education through a mastery-based incubator process (section 33-1632).

### RECONSIDER THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOL AND INDIVIDUALIZE LEARNING.

Policymakers can take bold steps to address the havoc the pandemic and learning disruptions have wrought on students, schools and communities. States and districts have, and will continue to have, substantial federal stimulus funds that can be used to recover lost learning, reimagine post-pandemic schooling and individualize learning.

- **LEAP Grants:** Learning Equity and Progress (LEAP grants) are direct payments to parents that can be used to cover a variety of education-related expenses. States could provide LEAP grants to all students, focus only on students in certain schools, or support students who lost the most learning during the pandemic. States can also choose from a variety of mechanisms to fund LEAP grants. They could incentivize LEAP scholarships by establishing a tax credit or redirecting the state portion of education funding to families.
- **Microgrants:** States can provide families with microgrants to spend on a range of academic and enrichment activities and programs. Funding can be structured to provide a smaller but still impactful amount for every public school student or greater amounts for families who live at or below a certain income threshold. Families could access funds through a secure website and spend their microgrants on pre-approved services, such as tutoring, summer camp or enrichment tuition, summer sports leagues, music or arts classes, mental health counseling, education therapies, telehealth services or college/career counseling.



### STATE SPOTLIGHT: ARIZONA

Arizona Governor Doug Ducey became one of the first governors to leverage Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funding for innovation grants. This \$1 million investment in A for [Arizona's Expansion & Innovation Fund](#) provides microgrants to K-12 schools that are innovating to best serve their students. Notably, the microgrants enable school leaders to accelerate innovative learning for Arizona's most vulnerable student populations.

- **Statewide Tutoring Corps:** Statewide tutoring corps are state-funded tutors focused on serving students who have the largest learning gaps to fill and the least ability to pay for individualized instruction. This policy is grounded in research that shows tutoring has substantial, positive impacts on academic outcomes. It encourages states to get creative in leveraging untapped talent and existing providers to provide tutors to eligible students at no cost to the family.
- **Parent-Teacher Compacts:** Parent-teacher compacts allow parents to hire teachers directly, with teacher salaries paid by the state. This flexible arrangement can allow students with a variety of needs and learning styles to access high-quality, one-to-one or small group instruction in the environment that works best for them.



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- **Part-Time Enrollment:** Granting all students the right to access public schools on a part-time basis can encourage private and homeschool students to connect with the public school system. To facilitate this enrollment arrangement, state policy can provide financial incentives to school districts for enrolling students part-time, provide districts with discretion and flexibility to provide the services that families need and want, and require that families and districts be informed about current part-time enrollment opportunities.
- **District Contracting:** District contracting provides another avenue for students and families to access additional options without leaving their home district. This policy provides a framework for districts to contract with public and private providers, ranging from charter schools to microschools and even tutors. Through contracting, both parents and districts have more flexibility to tailor educational offerings to the needs of individual students.
- **Course Access:** Course access is a state level policy that closes opportunity gaps for students by providing equitable access to a wide range of high-quality courses from diverse, accountable providers. These courses, which can be delivered via virtual, face-to-face or hybrid methods, may not otherwise be available to students. Effective course access policies simplify the search and enrollment process for students and families by creating a statewide online catalog with information about providers, courses and previous outcomes. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growth in virtual course offerings—as well as increased desire for education choice—course access provides states with the opportunity to reimagine learning so that all students can access a high-quality education, regardless of zip code.

## RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- [ExcelinEd Landscape Analysis: Policy, Pilots, and the Path to Competency-Based Education: National Landscape Report](#)
- [ExcelinEd State Analysis: Tale of Three States](#)
- [ExcelinEd State Analysis: The Path to Personalized Learning: The Next Chapter in the Tale of Three States](#)
- [#AskExcelinEd: How Can States Transition to Student-Centered Learning?](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: Waivers and Flexibility Requests: Policy Solutions for States](#)
- [ExcelinEd National Landscape: State Progress Toward Next Generation Learning](#)
- [ExcelinEd National Analysis: Debunking the Myth of Seat-Time: A National Analysis of Seat-Time Requirements for Credit](#)
- [ExcelinEd Blog: Microgrants: Growing Innovative Learning Opportunities for All Students](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: Parent-Teacher Compacts](#)
- [ExcelinEd Policy Brief: Course Access Opportunity Incentive: How States Can Incentivize Districts to Provide All Students with Access to Critical Courses](#)



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