Education Policy Playbook

2023

CHANGING POLICY,
CHANGING LIVES
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 immediate task at hand is recovering from the pandemic’s profound disruption to education—and its grave and continued impact on our students. The latest data from the Nation’s Report Card confirm that students’ reading and math skills have dropped in almost all states. Declines in average scores for math were the largest ever recorded. And even before the pandemic, the U.S. ranked only 25th internationally 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 reimagined.

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 doing big things. I think we need to triple our efforts. Success is never final, and reform is never complete. Think of all the kids who have gotten the chance to rise up because we changed laws to give people hope.”

Jeb Bush
ExcelinEd Chairman and 43rd Governor of Florida
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.
- Ensure all students are prepared to succeed in algebra.

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.
- Create infrastructure to equip students with 21st-century skills such as computer science, financial literacy and data science.

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.
**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.

According to the 2022 Nation’s Report Card, 65% of 4th graders are not reading on grade level. 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.
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 knowledge and skills based on the science of reading 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 as a last resort and provide intensive interventions and specialized support from a highly effective teacher.

- **Eliminate outdated curriculum:** Proactively ban three-cueing, curricula and reading strategies not aligned to the science of reading.

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 3rd in the nation in fourth grade reading achievement. Mississippi is ranked in the top five for Black, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged student performance in 2022.

![Scale Score Improvement](image)

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

1 [The Costs and Benefits of Test-Based Promotion](https://example.com), Marcus Winters 2017
2 [The Effects of Test-Based Retention on Student Outcomes Over Time: Regression discontinuity evidence from Florida](https://example.com), Guido Schwerdt, Martin R. West, Marcus A. Winters 2017
3 [Test-Based Promotion and Student Performance in Florida and Arizona](https://example.com), Paul Perrault, Marcus Winters 2020
Close Learning Gaps

POLICY: EARLY LITERACY

RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- ExcelinEd Comprehensive How-To Guide: Approaches to Implementing Early Literacy Policies
- ExcelinEd Model Policy: Comprehensive Early Literacy
- ExcelinEd Fact Sheet: Why the Three-Cueing Systems Model Doesn’t Teach Children to Read
- ExcelinEd Model Policy on Prohibiting Three-Cueing
- ExcelinEd Model Policy: Aligning Educator Preparation Programs to the Science of Reading
- ExcelinEd Model Policy: Identifying and Supporting Students with Characteristics of Dyslexia
- ExcelinEd Research: The Effect of Retention Under Mississippi’s Test-Based Promotion Policy

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 nine percentage points, while decreasing the percent of students below basic by ten percentage points since 2013. Mississippi is now 1st in the nation for improvements in 4th grade reading. Recent research, The Effect of Retention Under Mississippi’s Test-Based Promotion Policy, confirmed the positive impact of Mississippi’s approach.

“I’ve witnessed the profound impact of comprehensive literacy policy on student achievement. Mississippi’s first-in-class accomplishments can inspire every state to do better. The sky’s the limit when we deliver solutions, invest wisely and believe in our kids!”

Dr. Carey Wright

MISSISSIPPI 4TH GRADE READING PERFORMANCE ON NAEP


at or above Proficient below Basic
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
CLOSE LEARNING GAPS

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 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.
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.¹

4TH GRADE READING IMPROVEMENT

Prior to pandemic disruptions, 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.

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.² 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 Institute³ 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.

¹ May 2014 National Survey Conducted by McLaughlin & Associates.
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 2022 NAEP, Florida students outperformed their peers in every student subgroup in grades 4 and 8 Reading and grade 4 Mathematics.
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POLICY: TEACHER PIPELINES AND RETENTION

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 prepare today’s students to succeed in an ever-changing 21st-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 PIPELINES AND RETENTION?

Teacher shortages are a perennial problem. Despite decades of robust discussion and research, the problem of teacher shortages has become more pronounced—and better publicized—since the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand the complexity of shortages, both recruitment and retention must be addressed.

- Shortages are not equal everywhere or across all subjects. Rural and low-income schools tend to have worse shortages than suburban and high-income schools. Subject areas with the greatest need include foreign language, special education, English Language Learners and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

- Studies consistently show increased academic outcomes for students who have teachers of a similar background. The teacher workforce is more than 70% white females and there is a shortage of teachers of color compared to the American student body, which is becoming increasingly diverse.

- The number of teacher candidates is declining. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics showed that bachelor’s degrees awarded in education between 2006 and 2019 declined by 22 percent.

- Average teacher wages in only six states meet a standard for a living wage for an adult to support themselves and one child—and none meet that standard for an average first-year teacher. According to the 2022 National Teacher and Principal Survey, 17% of teachers have an additional job outside of their school system to support themselves.

To better support teachers and expand opportunities for other talented individuals to enter the profession, existing state policies can be improved to recruit, retain and develop a diverse pool of talented and content-rich teachers. These may include financial incentives, flexible teacher certification policies, modernized teacher preparation programs and/or other effective professional development opportunities.
Close Learning Gaps
POLICY: TEACHER PIPELINES AND RETENTION

POLICY SOLUTIONS

REDUCE BARRIERS TO ENTRY TO GROW AND DIVERSIFY PIPELINES AND HELP DISTRICTS ADDRESS SHORTAGES NOW.

• Provide pathways for high-performing high school students, paraprofessionals currently working in schools or individuals with bachelor’s degrees in a field other than education to enter teacher preparation programs.

• Support districts in partnering with a range of education preparation providers—including those that are online and out-of-state—to provide on the job competency-based teacher apprenticeships that results in a bachelor's degree and/or licensure.

• Supplement state funding with federal resources, such as the Department of Labor’s federally registered teacher apprenticeship program.

• Ease acute teacher shortages by allowing experienced individuals who hold a bachelor’s degree to teach without a license but under the mentorship of an experienced teacher for up to three years.

PROVIDE FINANCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL INCENTIVES TO RETAIN HIGH-PERFORMING TEACHERS.

• Support districts in taking a standardized, holistic approach to identifying high-performing teachers.

• Award high performing teachers a designation on their license that is attached to a district-funded increase in pay and/or a teacher leadership role.

• Incentivize designated teachers to teach in high needs (urban, rural and low-performing) districts by sending additional state funds to those districts and ensuring that 90% of those funds are earmarked to increase the salaries of designated teachers.

REIMAGINE THE PROFESSION OF TEACHING.

• Retain teachers in the profession by allowing them to contract directly with families to teach students on a full- or part-time basis through a state-sponsored “chartered teacher” program.

• Ensure that the full or proportional state per-pupil allocation a student would have received in their district goes to pay the chartered teacher’s salary.

• Allow chartered teachers, as employees of the state, access to the same benefits (healthcare and retirement) as any other state employee.

RESEARCH & RESOURCES

• ExcelinEd Model Policies:
  - Chartered Teachers Act
  - Teachers Apprenticeship Act
  - Advanced Teaching Incentive Act
  - Adjunct Teacher Act
  - Reciprocal Teacher Licensure

• State teacher policy database: National Council on Teacher Quality

• Alternative certification: TNTP Teaching Fellows Program

• Teacher and leader career ladders: Extending the Reach of Excellent Teaching

• Summary of the National Center for Education Statistics 2022 National Teacher and Principal Survey

• Learning Policy Institute: Understanding Teacher Compensation: A State by State Analysis
STATE SPOTLIGHT: TENNESSEE

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Labor approved Tennessee to offer the first federally registered teacher apprenticeship program in the nation. Using a version of the “Grow Your Own” approach for strengthening teacher pipelines, the Tennessee model creates partnerships between school districts and educator preparation programs. The partnerships allow recent high school graduates, paraprofessionals and others to obtain a bachelor’s degree and/or teaching certification at little to no cost, because the program leverages sustainable federal and workforce funds. Teacher apprentices earn a living wage as they progress through on-the-job training.

Tennessee Education Commissioner Dr. Penny Schwinn joined ExcelinEd’s Chairman Gov. Jeb Bush and CEO Patricia Levesque for a webinar and discussion on Tennessee’s Grow Your Own apprenticeship program. They highlighted what this new teaching pathway could mean for state education systems and a post-pandemic economy across the country.

- Grow Your Own Apprenticeship: [ExcelinEd Webinar: Taking Tennessee’s Teacher Apprenticeship Program National](#)
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.
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, TENNESSEE 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.

Tennessee significantly overhauled its education funding system in 2022. Policymakers transformed it from an input-based approach to a modernized, student-centered formula where money follows the students to all public schools. The new system includes substantial funding weights for low income students, financial rewards for school excellence and incentives to districts to offer high-value career and technical education.

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.

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
- ExcelinEd Issue Brief: Rewarding Success in Texas--College, Career and Military Readiness Bonuses
- ExcelinEd Issue Brief: Leveraging Federal Stimulus Funds in Tennessee
CLOSE LEARNING GAPS

POLICY: K-8 MATH

Our nation has relinquished its mathematical prowess, with declining performance trends in both international and national measures. It’s time to start bending the curve upward, so all students are ready to succeed in math and prepared to solve problems in the world beyond school.

WHY FOCUS ON MATH POLICY?

Success in mathematics education is vitally important for all students. It gives them college and career options, increases prospects for future income and improves outcomes later in life.

Unfortunately, there are not quick fixes. A comprehensive K-8 mathematics strategy includes daily math instruction with high quality content and instructional materials; support for teachers; assessments and parent notification; interventions; and resources for families and caregivers.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

The National Mathematics Advisory Panel serves as the basis for ExcelinEd’s K-8 Math Policy and Fundamental Principles. The policy solutions below provide the foundation to ensure all students are prepared to succeed in Algebra. This has long been cited as a predictor of postsecondary future success, especially for students pursuing career paths in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

- Adopt high-quality instructional materials grounded in the National Mathematics Advisory Panel findings and aligned to state standards.
- Ensure high-quality instructional materials include the study of traditional operations on numbers.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

- Provide statewide math training for K-8 teachers and administrators with ongoing, job-embedded math professional development and support for teachers via math coaches.
- Ensure teacher preparation programs at the state and local levels are preparing teacher candidates to have the knowledge and skills to teach all kids math based on the National Mathematics Advisory Panel findings.

ASSESSMENTS AND PARENT NOTIFICATION

- Administer math screening within the first 30 days of school and progress monitoring for K-8 students throughout the year.
- Notify parents when a math difficulty is identified and provide continued caregiver engagement with each progress report.
INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION
• Provide daily core math instruction, ideally for 60 minutes.
• Provide targeted intervention for students who demonstrate persistent difficulty in math, with evidence-based interventions and extended learning time during the school day and/or before/after school.
• Create individual math plans for K-8 students identified with a math difficulty.
• Provide relevant summer activities to all K-8 students struggling in math.
• Ensure math interventions also address social, attitudinal and motivational factors.

FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS
• Create Math-at-Home Plans for students identified with a math difficulty.
• Develop and maintain a list of vetted online resource hubs for all parents to support math at home.

RESEARCH & RESOURCES
• ExcelInEd Policy Fundamentals: It Adds up to Algebra I Readiness
• ExcelInEd Model Policy: K-8 Math
• ExcelInEd Model Policy: Extra Time
• ExcelInEd Model Policy: Instruction and Departmentalization
• ExcelInEd Blog: Responding to NAEP: A National Priority
• Florida’s 2022 NAEP Scores Require Literacy and Math Policy Changes

UNDERSTANDING K-8 MATH
• The Science of Math: A movement focused on using objective evidence about how students learn math in order to make educational decisions and inform policy and practice.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES
• EdReports, free reports about the quality of instructional materials.
• WWC | Find What Works! (ed.gov), scientific evidence on education programs, products, practices, and policies that work.
• Welcome - Math Nation, resource that helps students master middle and high school math.
• Khan Academy, free practice for students at their own pace, first filling in gaps in their understanding and then accelerating their learning.
• Zearn, math learning platform, free for teachers.
Bridge the Digital Divide

ENSURING EVERY STUDENT HAS EQUITABLE ACCESS TO THE DIGITAL SUPERHIGHWAY

POLICY: DIGITAL

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 educational digital devices and access to broadband at home and at school.

WHY FOCUS ON THE DIGITAL DIVIDE?

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

- **14%** of children 3-28 have no internet access at home.
- **17%** of children 3-28 live in households without a laptop or desktop computer.
- **34%** of families surveyed reported not having internet because they were unable to afford it.

The digital divide is real. More than 15 million K-12 students lack access to reliable broadband or devices, and 400,000 public school teachers lack broadband. Up to three in ten teenagers lack the access they need to broadband and devices to complete homework assignments.

Digital policies include several related policy issues, such as digital access, adoption, affordability, equity and literacy. A comprehensive approach to state digital policies in these areas is necessary to ensure students, families and educators receive equitable access and can participate in meaningful digital learning experiences.

Stakeholders within, and outside, the education ecosystem play an important role in advancing digital policies and need to work together to build solutions and policies to bridge the digital divide.
POLICY SOLUTIONS

To bridge the digital divide and fully leverage digital resources, ExcelinEd has identified four key policy areas for state leaders to focus on. For quick reference, resources related to these topics are available in a digital policy toolkit that is regularly updated as ExcelinEd identifies and develops new resources.

INFRASTRUCTURE
These policies ensure states identify students’ needs, effectively leverage funds & develop sustainable models for digital access

PARTNERSHIPS
Bridging the digital divide requires coordinated efforts across state agencies, with industry experts & community partners

STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES
Digital access supports opportunities through virtual school choices, online tutoring & access to broadband career pathways

DIGITAL TEACHING AND LEARNING
Digital teaching and learning include the tools, instructional materials and aligned educator trainings that ensure instruction effectively integrates technology, while digital skills training for students and families ensures they can access that instruction

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 and the resources provided here to build on 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](https://www.everybodylearnsinitiative.org) 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](https://alabamaeducation.net/alabama-broadband-connectivity-program/).

- The **Mississippi** Legislature allocated $200 million for [Mississippi Connects](https://www.msconnects.com) to ensure that every student receives the technology needed to learn at school and at home.
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: OHIO
Despite billions of federal dollars being focused on broadband expansion, states are just beginning to identify shortages in the available workforce to deploy and maintain broadband networks. In 2021, Ohio invested $500 million in state funds to expand broadband, and its industry leaders sounded the alarm about the dearth of qualified workers to make efficient use of those funds. Since then, Ohio has led the way to increase broadband career awareness and establish relevant training programs. Through the Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation, Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted leads Ohio’s Broadband-5G Sector Partnership, a collaboration that includes ExcelinEd as well as government agencies, K-12 and higher education and industry experts focused on meeting Ohio’s need for a skilled broadband workforce.

- Strengthening the Broadband Workforce: Learning from Ohio’s Model

RESEARCH & RESOURCES

EXCEL IN ED’S MODEL POLICIES
- Closing the Digital Divide in Education Act with a Policy Summary
- Digital Devices for All Act

EXCEL IN ED’S HOW-TO GUIDES
- Affordable Connectivity Program Resources
- Guide to Effectively Leveraging E-Rate Funding
- Strengthening the Broadband Workforce

EXCEL IN ED’S POLICY BRIEFS AND BLOGS
- A Digital Policy Glossary: Key Terms for Education Policy Leaders
- Achieving K-12 Broadband Goals Using a State RFI
- Building Digital Citizenship Post-COVID
- Ensuring Digital Readiness for Educators
- Florida Virtual School’s 25th Anniversary Part 1 and Part 2
- Teacher Support for Effective Technology-Enabled Instruction
- The Ongoing Need for Academic Digital Skills

STAY CONNECTED ON DIGITAL POLICY ISSUES
Closing the digital divide requires partnerships between state policymakers, state broadband and education agencies, community partners, internet service providers and more. ExcelinEd facilitates quarterly opportunities for partnership through its Digital Divide Network, which includes representatives of each of those stakeholder groups. States interested in participating can contact Amy Owen, ExcelinEd’s director of digital policy, at Amy@ExcelinEd.org.
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.
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:

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

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.
STATE SPOTLIGHT: FLORIDA

To support charters in the Sunshine State, policymakers passed legislation to establish the Florida Institute for Charter School Innovation at Miami Dade College. The institute will gather and share best practices and data to help charter schools manage their resources.

Lawmakers also passed legislation that:

• Guarantees a 15-year renewal for high performing “A” or “B” rated charter schools.
• Automatically renews a school’s charter if the district fails to follow the proper procedure, limiting disruptions to students.
• Clarifies the intent of charter schools by codifying in law that charter school students are public school students and should be funded as such.
• Studies the distribution of funds provided to charter schools and make recommendations for a more equitable allocation to all public schools.
• Simplifies the process and expands flexibility for schools’ charter updates.

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
• National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: Voting with Their Feet: A State-level Analysis of Public Charter School and District Public School Enrollment Trends
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.
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: KANSAS
Kansas passed legislation to ensure parents can more easily enroll their child in any public school of their choice. School districts are now required to set policies for identifying available space for nonresident students and enrolling them according to a lottery.

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.

RESEARCH & RESOURCES

• ExcelinEd Model Policy: Part-Time Enrollment
• ExcelinEd Model Policy: Open Districts
• ExcelinEd Policy Analysis: Part-Time Enrollment
• ExcelinEd Model Policy: Learn Everywhere
• ExcelinEd Blog: Four New Policies to Eliminate School Boundaries
• ExcelinEd Model Policy: No Boundaries for New Buildings
• ExcelinEd Model Policy: Make Room Act
• ExcelinEd Model Policy: The School Near Work Act
• ExcelinEd Model Policy: The Parent-Directed Funding Act
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.
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.
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.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: ARIZONA
Governor Doug Ducey signed a bill that expands the Arizona Empowerment Scholarship Account into a universal program for all Arizona students, becoming the most expansive K-12 education savings account program in the nation. The program will allow more than 1 million students to use scholarships toward tuition or fees, supplemental education materials, tutoring and other educational purposes.

RESEARCH & RESOURCES

EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS:
- ExcelinEd Policy Overview
- ExcelinEd Model Policy
- Informational Video: What Are Education Scholarship Accounts?
- ExcelinEd’s ESA Implementation Guide
- ExcelinEd Webinar: Building an ESA Program from the Ground Up

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?
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.
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—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.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: MISSISSIPPI
In 2022, Mississippi’s Comprehensive Career and Technical Education Reform Act passed the legislature unanimously. It establishes an annual inventory and return-on-investment analysis of CTE programs across K-12 and postsecondary systems. These will be used to evaluate and improve CTE program quality, maintain alignment with business/industry needs and measure student outcomes. Additionally, the bill streamlines the state’s approach to industry-recognized certifications by consolidating multiple lists (currently used for different purposes) and adding flexibility for school districts’ reimbursement of industry certification incentive funds. Additionally, the bill establishes a career coaching program for K-12 students.

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.
Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

POLICY: EDUCATION-TO-WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

- 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.

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.

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.

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, including actionable strategies on our Pathways Matter: Policies in Action website.

- 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
- ExcelInEd Webinar: How State Policies Build a Skilled, Educated Workforce
- ExcelInEd Report: Youth Apprenticeships in Action: Five State Perspectives
- ExcelInEd Blog: Pathways Matter: Policies in Action
- ExcelInEd Blog: Pathways Matter: State Studies
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 reimagined. 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.
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: MISSOURI
Missouri is building a strong foundation to spur innovation to help inspire students to graduate early and use their school funds for college. The new diploma program is an alternative pathway to graduation for high school students, allowing them to graduate as early as the end of 10th grade. Students who earn a Show Me Success Diploma may remain in high school or may instead enroll in a qualifying postsecondary institution. Students enrolled in postsecondary school will receive 90% of the proportionate share of state, local and federal funds the district or charter school receives for each student. The money is deposited into an education account, with the student named as the beneficiary.

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.
STATE SPOTLIGHT: IDAHO
In 2022, legislation to allow K-12 schools to designate students as “self-directed learners” passed both chambers and was signed into law by Governor Brad Little. The bill gives students added flexibility by allowing them to pursue learning opportunities in and out of the classroom. Teachers can offer or rescind the designation to a student based on the child’s self-motivation, academic growth and other criteria agreed upon by the teacher, student and parents.

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.

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 incent 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.

- **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.
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.

Rese_rch & 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 Landscape Analysis: Strengthening the Use of State-Authorized Waivers for Innovation
- ExcelinEd Flexibility Guide Series: South Carolina and Idaho