

PATHWAYS MATTER

# FLORIDA PATHWAYS: COLLEGE AND CAREER DASHBOARDS AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES





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### About ExcelinEd

Launched by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush in 2008, ExcelinEd supports state leaders in transforming education to unlock opportunity and lifelong success for each and every child. From policy development to implementation, ExcelinEd brings deep expertise and experience to customize education solutions for each state's unique needs. Focused on educational opportunity, innovation and quality, ExcelinEd's agenda is increasing student learning, advancing equity and readying graduates for college and career in states across the nation.



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# FLORIDA PATHWAYS: COLLEGE AND CAREER DASHBOARDS AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES



## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Florida has earned a national reputation as a state that embraces learner-centered policies to create a landscape where students have every opportunity to succeed.

Over the past four years, Florida policymakers have focused on aligning K-12, postsecondary and workforce systems to give high school students the tools they need to transition successfully into what comes next. A key part of this effort is creating a publicly accessible data dashboard to highlight the opportunities and outcomes associated with different college and career pathways, as mandated by the 2021 Reimagining Education and Career Help (REACH) Act.

To design a dashboard that truly meets the needs of students and families, it's critical to understand their goals, challenges and the information they value most. To that end, ExcelinEd has conducted a two-part analysis: a review of existing data dashboards in Florida related to post-high school success as well as a comprehensive survey of 1,237 students, parents and recent graduates to find out their needs via interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. Model school districts also were interviewed to learn how they are implementing college and career preparation.

This report synthesizes these insights to evaluate Florida's current dashboard system and its effectiveness in supporting students. We present six key findings and provide recommendations for policymakers to develop a new state data dashboard that will empower students with clear, personalized pathways to rewarding careers and long-term success.

Our findings coincide with an ongoing initiative to review Florida's Education Meets Opportunity Platform (EMOP) system. EMOP is intended to equip professionals with data on labor supply and demand, as well as return on investment (ROI) and program quality indicators for various educational programs. As policymakers evaluate the EMOP system and its data accessibility, we hope the findings and recommendations in this report will provide valuable insights that support the EMOP review process.

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## Findings: Existing Data Dashboard Analysis

Florida currently offers several data dashboards that provide meaningful information about different college and career pathways. These dashboards are scattered across different hosting agencies, including the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), Florida Department of Commerce, and local workforce boards.

Additionally, there are legacy dashboards that are online and publicly accessible but out of date, as well as dashboards that have been publicly funded and can be found online but are not actually publicly accessible. No unified, comprehensive, publicly accessible data dashboard as envisioned by the 2021 REACH Act currently exists.

The two primary dashboards are Xello and Employ Florida. Xello is Florida's official online career planning and work-based learning coordination system for K-12 students. The contract for Xello is managed by FLDOE and the platform is available to all students within the state. Employ Florida is managed by the Florida Department of Commerce in partnership with CareerSource Florida. The dashboard is designed to help match job seekers with employers across the state.

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## Findings: Student Learner Experience

ExcelinEd conducted focus groups and an online survey exploring the perceptions and experiences of Florida public high school students, recent high school graduates and parents of 7th-12th graders. The survey asked about future plans, comprehensive college and career pathways opportunities and the accessibility of information and resources related to learner pathways.

The following are top-level findings from the survey and focus groups:

- 1. Xello earns high marks from students and graduates who use the platform, but Xello adoption is not strong.** When asked, students who use Xello feel better prepared for life after graduation and are more confident that they will achieve their professional goals. However, fewer than 20% of high school students say they have used Xello.
- 2. Students value career & technical education and work-based learning, but access remains limited.** Recent graduates and current students that participate in strong pathway opportunities—such as work-based learning, career and technical education, industry credentials or college acceleration courses—reported higher levels of confidence. Yet roughly 20% of students report not having access to work-based learning, career and technical education or courses that lead to industry credentials.
- 3. Demand for information about college and career pathways is high.** Current students, parents and recent graduates all value clear information that compares different college and career pathways. They cite information about the time it takes to complete each program and program cost as most helpful.
- 4. But information is hard to access.** Receiving information on post high school pathways remains a major challenge for parents, students and recent graduates. Slightly more than half of students report receiving critical information about or support in accessing college and career pathways. Students were most likely to cite parents and college marketing materials as sources of information on postsecondary opportunities.

- 5. Students who already have a plan are more engaged.** Students who have a comprehensive pathway plan are more likely to find information about different postsecondary programs helpful; participate in both college and career preparation programs; and receive support and advice from education and guidance professionals.
- 6. More than half of students have a post-high school next step in mind.** Roughly a third of current students have a plan to immediately pursue a bachelor's degree after high school. Over a quarter of students plan to pursue a technical training program, join the military, begin an apprenticeship or directly enter the workforce after graduating high school. Yet many students in this group are not receiving the support they need; coursework and counseling remain geared toward preparing students for college.

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## Recommendations

As policymakers continue to improve access to college and career pathways information and collection of data, ExcelinEd offers the following recommendations based on the findings in this report:

- 1. Make school-level and district-level Xello usage data publicly available.** The state already covers the cost for every student to have access to the state's official online career planning and work-based learning coordination system. Making usage data publicly available will further increase transparency and incentivize schools to use the system and will provide an important feedback loop to policymakers who have invested in the platform.
- 2. Combine access to pathways planning and the data dashboard.** Embed Florida's future data dashboard within the Xello platform so parents and students have direct access to critical information within the same platform they use to create their postsecondary pathways plan.
- 3. Make the results of Florida's CTE Audit publicly accessible.** Florida's CTE Audit is an annual review of secondary and postsecondary CTE offerings designed to ensure program alignment and quality. We know from our survey that parents and students find the type of information contained in the CTE Audit helpful and therefore it should be made available to districts, schools, and families.
- 4. Engage businesses and intermediaries in the planning process.** Incentivize personalized career advisement supports and work-based learning opportunities by creating public-private partnerships with local businesses and intermediary organizations.
  - Provide a state match for the formation, or use of intermediary organizations to strengthen business and K-12 engagement, including the deployment of career coaches and offering of work-based learning experiences.
  - Prioritize schools with demonstrated commitment to Xello implementation.
  - Incentivize teachers to develop and support intermediaries and work-based learning experiences.
- 5. Leverage state and local governments as venues for work-based learning opportunities.** In many parts of the state, particularly in rural areas, local governments are among the largest employers. Students should have the opportunity to gain experience and knowledge from them. Utilize summer stipends for teachers to develop guidelines and support for implementation.

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## About the Research

ExcelinEd conducted an analysis of 11 existing data dashboards that currently include data that can support college and career pathways planning in Florida. The analysis looked at areas such as target users, major functionalities, data displayed and use cases.

ExcelinEd partnered with Edge Research to conduct focus groups and an online survey to explore the perceptions and experiences of public high school students, parents of 7th-12th graders and recent graduates in Florida. The survey aimed to gather insights into future plans, comprehensive college and career pathways opportunities and the accessibility of information and resources related to learner pathways. A total of 1,237 participants were surveyed, including 414 high school students (213 juniors and 201 seniors), 415 parents and 408 recent graduates.

The survey was designed to ensure a representative sample of each group by employing quotas based on gender, age and race/ethnicity. To accommodate diverse audiences, the survey was available in both English and Spanish. Fielded between September 16 and October 15, 2024, the survey collected data on various topics, such as gaps in pathway resources, reactions to pathway data, awareness and usage of Xello and preferred messengers and communication channels.

Additionally, Edge Research interviewed model school districts to learn how they are implementing college and career preparation advising.

# Florida's Data Dashboard Landscape

Florida offers several data dashboards that provide meaningful information about different college and career pathways. These dashboards represent a significant step toward equipping students, parents and educators with data to make informed decisions about postsecondary opportunities and career planning. The challenge is that these dashboards are scattered across different hosting agencies, including the federal government, state government and non-governmental organizations.

Two further complications make finding information on college and career pathways difficult; 1) there are legacy dashboards that remain online and publicly accessible but are out of date; and 2) there are data dashboards that are publicly funded and can be found online but are not publicly accessible. At this point, no unified, comprehensive, publicly accessible data dashboard as envisioned by the 2021 REACH Act exists.

Major Active Dashboards include:

## Xello

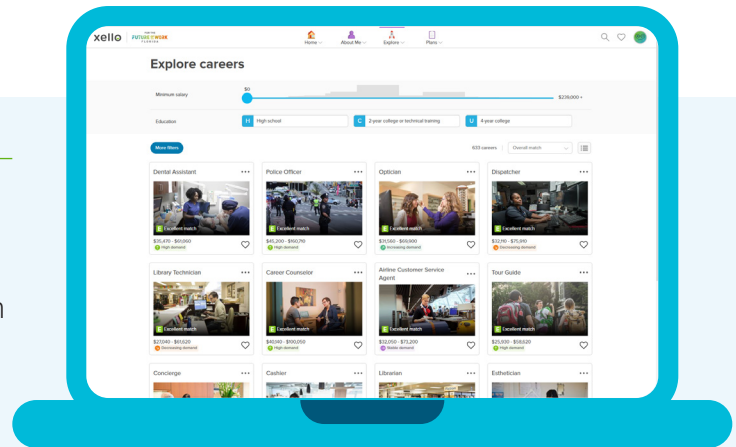
**Audience:** K-12 students

**Focus:** Online Career Planning and Work-based Learning Coordination System

In February 2023, the Florida Department of Education announced that the private education company Xello would be Florida's new official online career planning and work-based learning coordination system. Funded through a recurring \$4 million state appropriation, Xello is available to all public K-12 students and all school districts free of charge. In addition to covering the program cost, FLDOE launched a statewide initiative to support the widespread adoption of Xello across the state.

Xello combines national and regional labor market data to provide students with a clear view of employment opportunities. This includes national employment figures, job openings and employment growth trends from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Additionally, the Florida Department of Commerce provides state, regional and county-specific employment statistics. This information is integrated into a demand chart on Xello, offering students insights into employment trends across different geographies. Xello also incorporates BLS data on salaries into its career profiles.

Regarding postsecondary education, Xello includes detailed academic and institutional profiles provided by FloridaShines, a collaborative data source hosted by the Florida College System, State University System and the Florida Department of Education. These profiles provide extensive information about educational programs within Florida. In addition, data from the Florida Economic Security Report, sourced from the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP), includes metrics such as wages and employment rates post-graduation, aiding students in making informed educational choices.



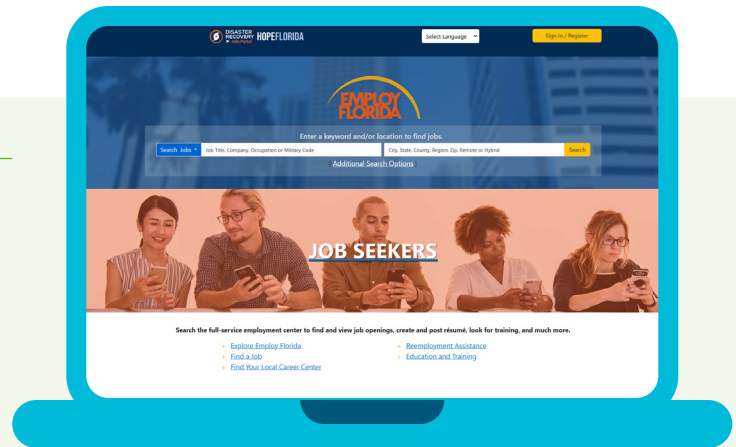
## Employ Florida

**Audience:** Adults

**Focus:** Connecting Job Seekers and Employers

Employ Florida is a publicly accessible job portal managed through a partnership between the Florida Department of Commerce and Florida's workforce boards. It is designed to link all of Florida's state and local workforce services and resources, providing a centralized platform for job seekers and employers to connect. The platform provides information for job seekers and employers. It also provides more general information on Florida's labor markets.

Job seekers can search for regional jobs, access education and training resources, locate career centers and explore reemployment benefits. Employers can post job openings, access labor market data and search for candidates. The labor market section allows users to explore professions and generate detailed reports, including job duties, available listings, geographic distribution, education and experience requirements, wage rates and growth projections. Additional features include tools for identifying top occupations and industries, a resume builder and a career explorer to align user profiles with potential careers.

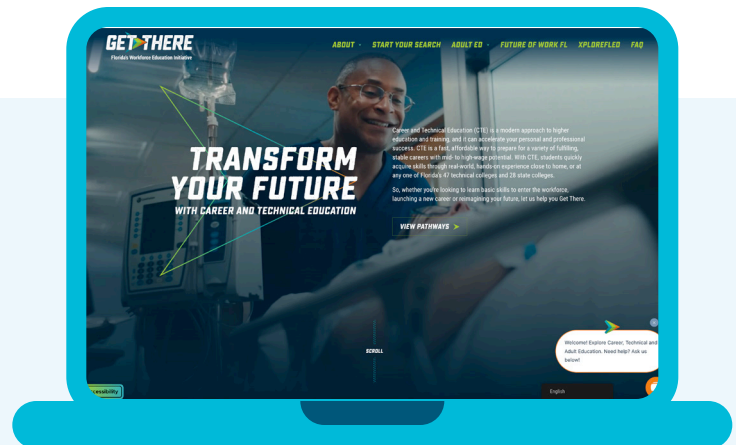


## Get There, Florida: A workforce education initiative

**Audience:** K-12 students

**Focus:** Short-term, high-value programs

“Get There Florida” is a workforce education initiative launched by the FLDOE in 2020. It is aimed at increasing awareness of short-term, high-value Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. The initiative highlights 17 CTE programs. Each program includes a brief description of the field (e.g., manufacturing) and provides information on high school programs that align with this career pathway. Additional information includes high school certifications that count toward the field, how the different credentials within the field can articulate into college credit and employment statistics such as wages and projected demand. Additionally, the website includes a list of apprenticeship providers displayed on a map of the state along with all of Florida's technical colleges.



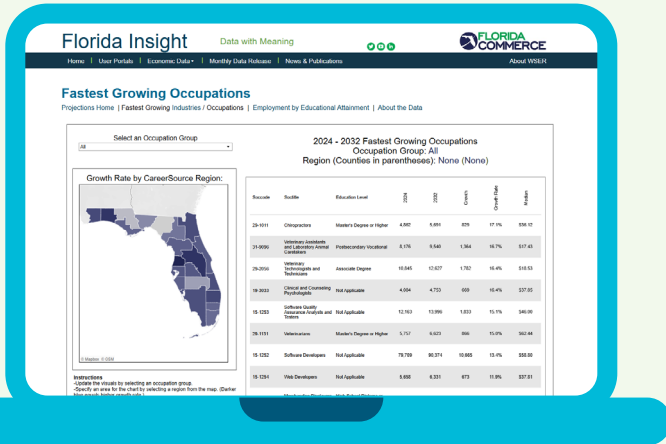
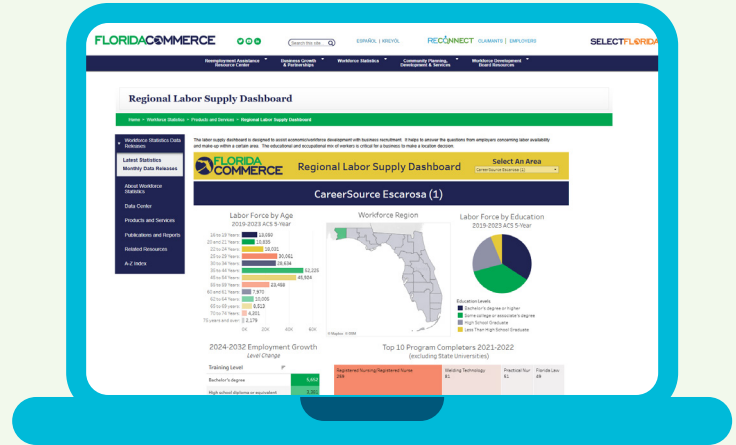
# Florida Department of Commerce Dashboards

## REGIONAL LABOR SUPPLY DASHBOARD:

**Audience:** Employers and researchers

**Focus:** Labor availability

The Regional Labor Supply Dashboard provides a breakdown of the labor force, economic trends and educational requirements of each of Florida's 23 CareerSource boards. Consistently updated, the dashboard provides the distribution of the labor force by age and educational level and lists the top 10 fastest-growing occupations and the top 10 occupations in terms of total job listings. Each of these lists includes projections over the next eight years, the growth rate, current job openings, current hourly wage and the education level required.



## FASTEST GROWING OCCUPATIONS:

**Audience:** Job seekers, career planning, employers

**Focus:** Industry and occupation projects

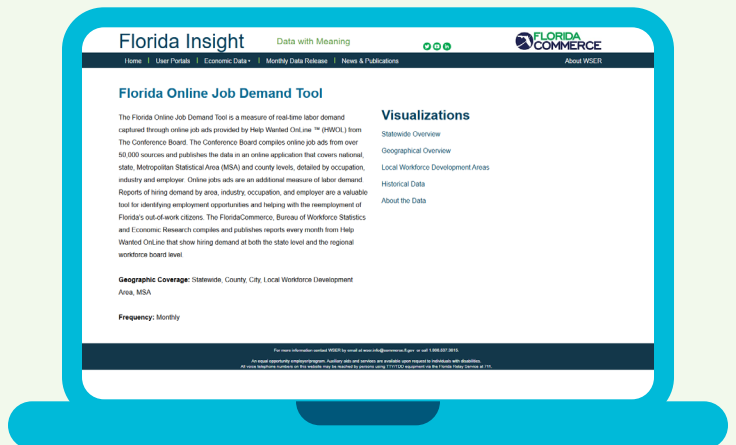
Users can explore the Fastest Growing Occupations tool to see which jobs are projected to grow the most over the next eight years within each CareerSource region. The dashboard provides the job title, education level required, current number of jobs, projected number of jobs years into the future, the growth rate and the median income.

## FLORIDA ONLINE JOB DEMAND TOOL:

**Audience:** Researchers, job seekers, employers

**Focus:** Job demand

This online tool uses Help Wanted Online (HWOL) data to provide current demand for occupations based on online job ads. The tool lists the 15 counties and 15 cities with the most job postings and provides the top 15 occupations advertised within each CareerSource region.

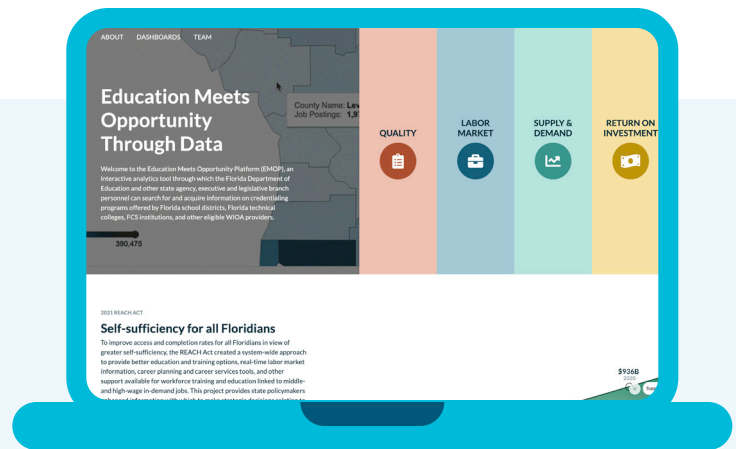


# Education Meets Opportunity Platform (EMOP)

**Audience:** State policymakers

**Focus:** Postsecondary program outcomes

Florida's EMOP system is an interactive analytics dashboard that includes K-12 and postsecondary CTE and adult education program quality metrics (college enrollment, retention and post-graduation outcomes), labor market information, job supply and demand and return on investment data. EMOP is accessible to a select group of state agency, legislative and executive branch personnel.



# Findings: Student Learner Experience

ExcelinEd conducted focus groups and an online survey exploring the perceptions and experiences of Florida public high school students, recent high school graduates and parents of 7th-12th graders. The survey asked about future plans, comprehensive college and career pathways opportunities and the accessibility of information and resources related to learner pathways.

The following are findings from the survey and focus groups:

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## 1. Xello earns high marks from students and graduates who use the platform, but Xello adoption is not strong.

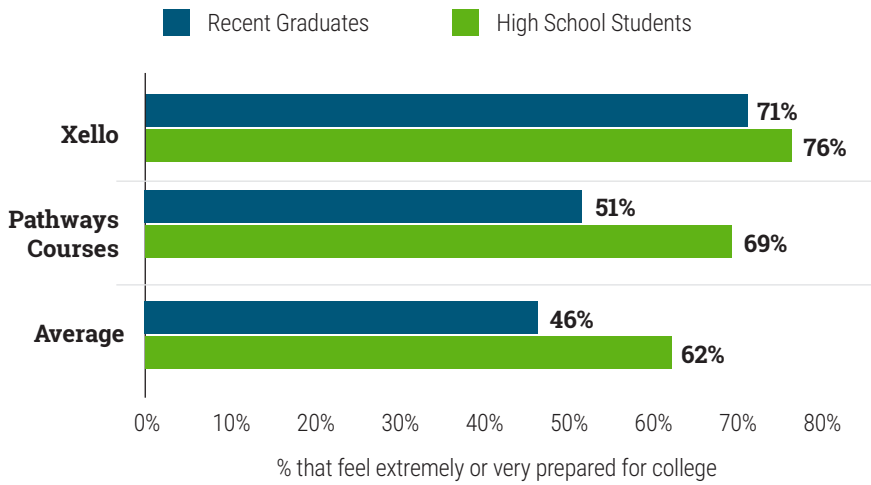
Many Florida students face uncertainty as they navigate life after graduation. Fewer than half of recent high school graduates felt extremely or very well prepared for college, and only 38% felt ready for a career. Current high school students are slightly more optimistic, yet a substantial portion still feels unprepared: 38% report being unready for college, and 45% feel unprepared for a career.

Additionally, both recent graduates and current students lack confidence that they will be able to achieve their professional goals. Current high school students' top priorities are finding a fulfilling career path and achieving financial independence, yet only about 40% feel confident they will achieve either of these priorities. The findings for recent graduates are similar. Only 40% feel they will find a career that makes them happy or find a career that allows them to earn a good wage. A major concern of recent graduates is the cost of postsecondary education. Approximately half of respondents think the cost of postsecondary education is extremely important, and only 27% feel confident that they will be able to pay for their education.

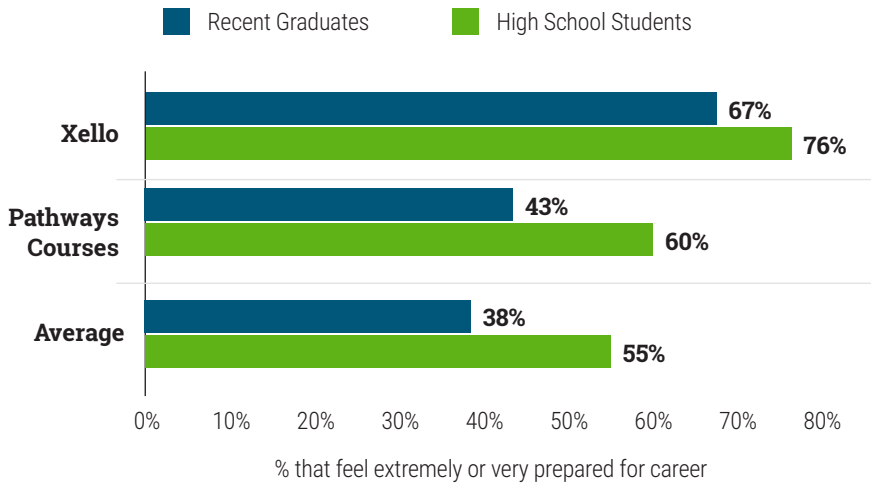
Students who use Xello, however, report much higher levels of preparedness for college and career and feel more confident about attaining their professional goals. Current students using Xello feel 14 percentage points more prepared for college and 21 percentage points more prepared for a career compared to the average. Among recent graduates, the differences are even larger, at 25 percentage points above the average for college and 29 percentage points above the average for career readiness. Xello users also feel more confident that they will be able to achieve their professional goals compared to non-Xello users.

However, Xello use also remains low. Only 18% of current students, 16% of parents and 15% of recent graduates report using the platform.

**COLLEGE: Students that use Xello or participate in pathways opportunities report feeling better prepared for college**



**CAREER: Students that use Xello or participate in pathways opportunities report feeling better prepared for a career**



**EFFECTIVE XELLO USAGE ACROSS FLORIDA DISTRICTS**

Several Florida districts stand out for their strategic and impactful integration of Xello into college and career planning:

**Pinellas County** employs a structured, multi-year approach starting in eighth grade, where students create and refine four-year plans through biannual counselor meetings. Each high school grade focuses on targeted Xello activities, ensuring consistent and purposeful engagement.

**Seminole County** begins career exploration with Xello as early as elementary school. Students develop mandatory career plans in middle school, revisiting them annually in high school.

**Duval County** aligns Xello with its “Pre-K to Postsecondary Pathway” initiative. Students begin building career plans in middle school and use Xello in high school to map coursework and goals, complementing the district’s robust CTE programs.

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## 2. Students value career & technical education and work-based learning, but access remains limited.

Students who participate in strong pathway opportunities, which include CTE, work-based learning and industry credential programs, feel better prepared for college and careers and are more confident they will achieve their professional goals. High school students engaged in strong pathway opportunities report college and career preparedness levels that are seven and five percentage points higher, respectively, than their peers. Similar trends are seen among recent graduates. Additionally, current students and recent graduates that participated in these opportunities feel more confident that they will be able to achieve their professional goals compared to students that did not participate in these opportunities.

However, current students report limited access to career focused programs. 97% of current students say they have access to advanced, college preparation or honors classes, and 92% of students say they can earn college credits at their high school. Yet only about 80% of students say they have access to work-based learning opportunities or industry credentials, and 85% of students say they have access to CTE classes. Florida's investment in expanding career pathway course means that all students should have access to these programs, suggesting there is a disconnect between students' perceptions of course availability and actual availability.

Participation in coursework varies significantly among high school students. Current students enroll in college preparation courses at twice the rate that students enroll in career and technical education courses. Additionally, there is a 26-percentage point gap between students earning college credit (58%) and those earning an industry credential (32%).

### LAFAYETTE COUNTY: EARLY DUAL ENROLLMENT AND CTE COMMITMENT

Lafayette County takes a proactive approach to college and career preparation, requiring all high school students to take at least one CTE course annually. Students are encouraged to start dual enrollment in 10th grade, with the goal of making their senior year the first year of college. Approximately 30% of students take classes at the local technical college, and the school prioritizes earning industry certifications, which provide immediate job opportunities and additional revenue for the school. With 92% of graduates deemed "college and career accelerated," Lafayette demonstrates how early intervention leads to measurable success.

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## 3. Demand for information about college and career pathways is high.

High school students, parents and recent graduates show a strong demand for clear, comparative information about college and career pathway programs. They prioritize data that allows them to easily evaluate options and make informed decisions.

The most valuable information to survey respondents is being able to evaluate the time required to complete degrees or credentials with the ability to compare this information across programs: 86% of high school students and parents and 75% of recent graduates find this information either extremely or very helpful. Survey respondents are also interested to know the total cost of different programs, with 85–88% across all groups rating it highly. Comparative insights, such as the ability to evaluate different colleges, programs and associated costs, were particularly important to parents (84–87%) and slightly less so for recent graduates (73–76%).

Information on career outcomes, such as graduate salaries after one, five and 10 years as well as job placement rates were also seen as helpful, with 71–85% of respondents rating this data as highly useful. Parents generally found all information more valuable than current students and recent graduates, although across the board, roughly three out of four current students and recent graduates found the information helpful.

Overall, data related to time-to-completion, cost and career outcomes were the most helpful for all groups. For a full list of the types of information and responses, see the table below.

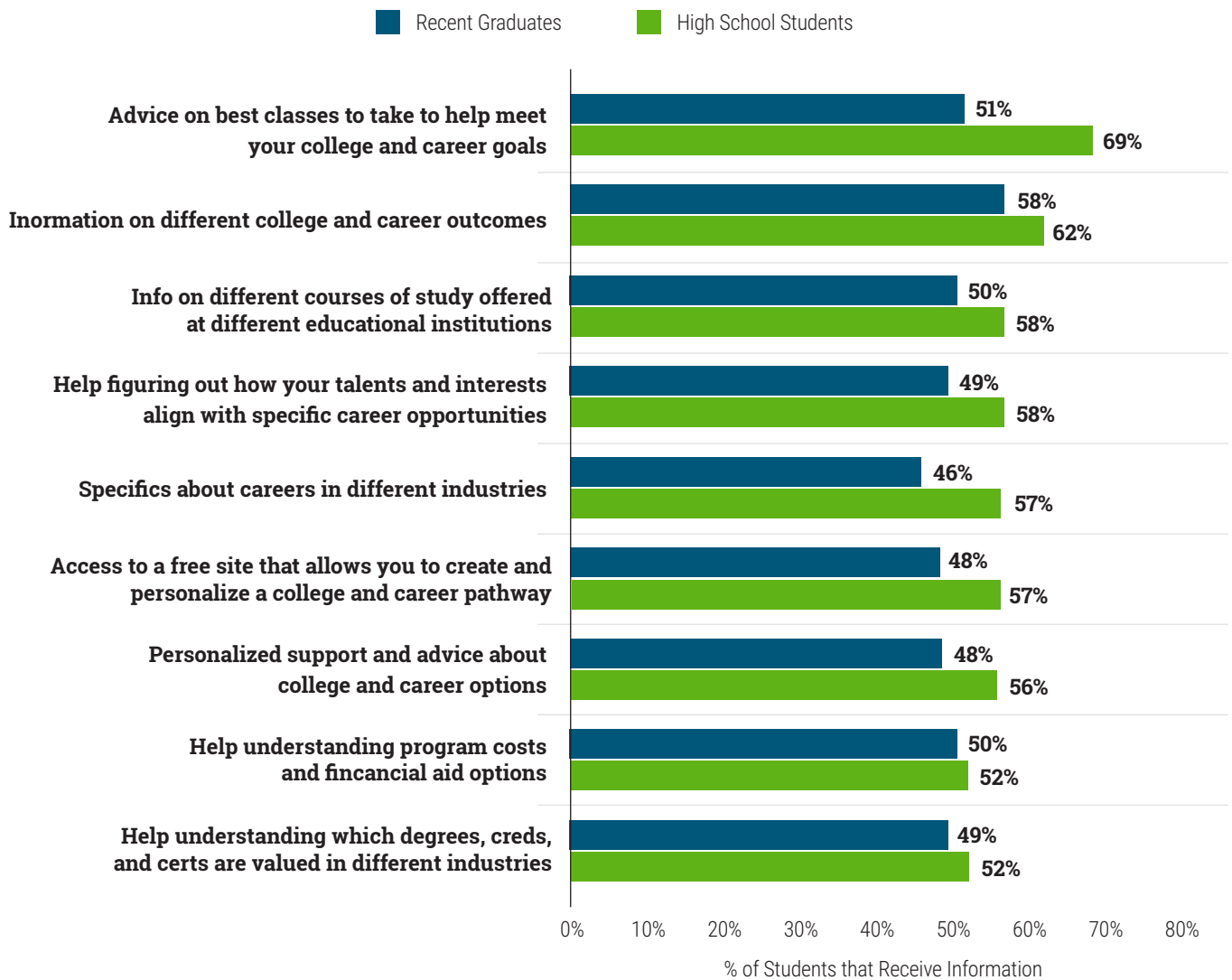
<b>How helpful is each of the following types of information you just saw?</b> <i>% Extremely/very helpful</i>	<b>High School Students</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Recent Graduates</b>
<b>Being able to compare how long it takes to complete different degrees and credentials</b>	86%	86%	74%
<b>The length of time it takes to complete each degree or credential</b>	86%	86%	75%
<b>The total cost of each program at a college</b>	85%	88%	75%
<b>Being able to compare different colleges and programs offered in a career pathway</b>	83%	87%	76%
<b>The degrees and credentials offered at each college</b>	81%	86%	71%
<b>Being able to compare costs across different colleges and programs</b>	81%	84%	73%
<b>The average salary of graduates one year, five years and 10 years after graduation from each program</b>	79%	83%	72%
<b>Being able to compare graduates' salaries across different colleges and programs</b>	78%	88%	71%
<b>The percentage of graduates who have a job related to their program within one year after graduating from each program</b>	77%	85%	75%
<b>Being able to compare completion rates across different schools and programs</b>	77%	83%	73%
<b>The percentage of students who complete each program at different colleges</b>	76%	81%	72%
<b>The percentage of students who continue their education within one year after graduating from each program</b>	73%	79%	68%

#### 4. But information is hard to access.

The survey asked recent graduates and current high school students about the information and support that they received during their time in high school across nine different questions. Depending on the question, between 50-60% of current high school students report receiving the information related to pathways planning, with current high school students receiving information about college and career pathways at a slightly higher rate than recent graduates.

For instance, only 52% of current high school students received information about the value of different degrees, credentials and certifications within an industry, and only 56% report receiving personalized advice and support on different college and career options. The one area where most current students reported receiving information was related to which classes to take during high school to meet college and career goals. See the chart below for a full list of the types of information included in the survey.

#### Substantial portions of both recent graduates and current students report not receiving information and support

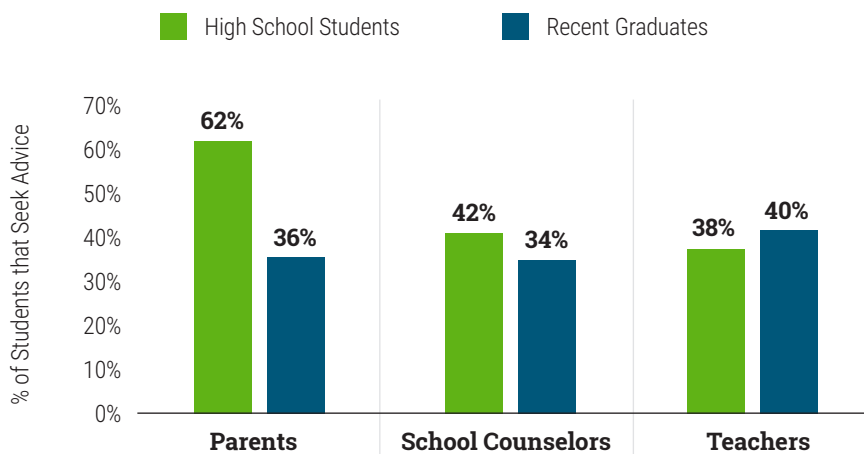


Additionally, there is no clear source of information for students. Among the various people that can provide advice to students, parents are the most frequently consulted, with 62% of current high school students discussing their post-high school plans with them. Recent graduates, however, are less inclined to seek their parents' advice on career and professional goals, with only 36% turning to them for guidance (a 26 percentage point difference compared to current students). And although school counselors and teachers are the second- and third-most consulted sources of advice for recent graduates and high school students, most do not discuss their postsecondary plans with either of these professionals.

When trying to find information on college and career pathways elsewhere, college marketing material is the most used source with roughly half of high school students and recent graduates turning to college websites, mailers and webinars. Parents are even more likely to turn to these materials, with two-thirds using them to find information on colleges and careers.

The second most widely used source of information is Google. Roughly 40% of current students, parents, and recent graduates all turn to the search engine to learn more about different college and career pathways.

### High School Students Rely on Parents Recent Graduates Seek Advice Elsewhere



### PINELLAS COUNTY: A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING

Pinellas County excels in interpersonal advisement, with dedicated College and Career Centers at every high school staffed by full-time Coordinators who collaborate with CTE teachers, local colleges and other college and career programs to ensure students receive comprehensive support. These coordinators, along with students Xello engagement, create targeted plans with activities for students to accomplish. For example, ninth grade students typically take personality inventories while 11th grade students are coached through college applications.

## 5. Students who already have a plan are more engaged.

Students with comprehensive pathway plans are better prepared to navigate both their high school careers and their postsecondary lives, yet only 47% of current high school students report having such a plan.

Current students with a plan participate in college and career preparatory coursework at a much higher rate relative to the average. For instance, 63% of students that have participated in CTE coursework have a comprehensive plan, 16 percentage points higher than that high school average.

Students with a plan are also more likely to seek advice and guidance from teachers, career advisors, college representatives, and tutors. While only 32% of students without a plan consult a teacher for information about college and career pathways, 46% of those with a plan do.

In addition to being more likely to seek advice, the level of support (see Finding 4 above) experienced by current high school students with a plan nearly doubled. On average, 43% of high school students without a plan felt they received support from their school across nine different categories compared to 74% of students with a plan feeling supported. Similarly, reported levels of support among recent graduates with a plan were 20 percentage points higher than recent graduates without a plan.

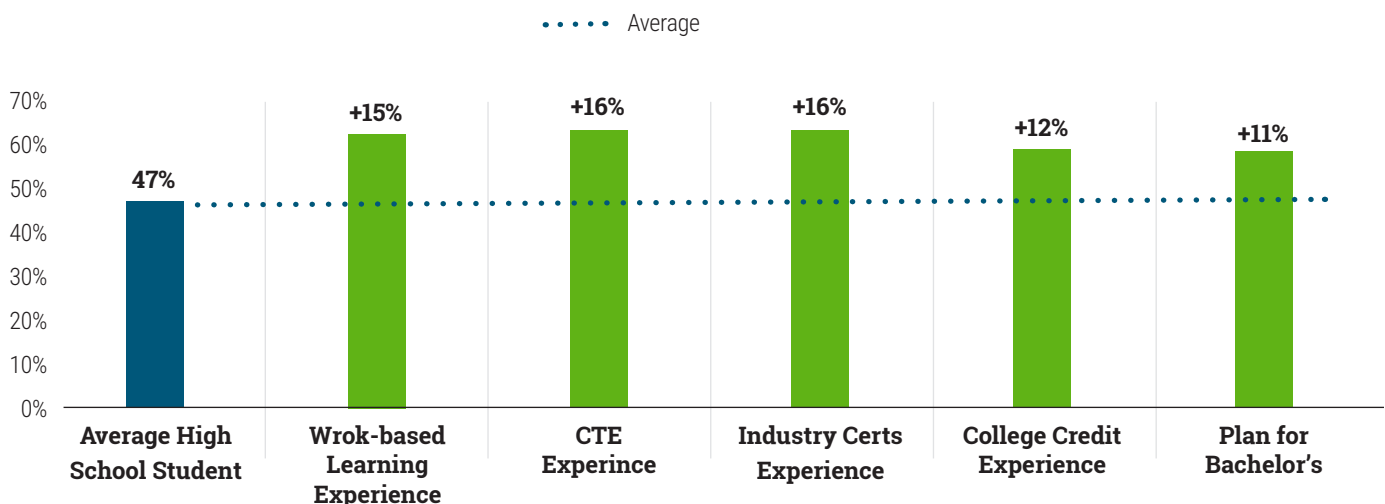
Finally, students with a plan find information about postsecondary programs more helpful than those without a plan. Across the board, these students had a greater appreciation for information about program costs, time-to-completion, and career alignment (see Finding 3 above) compared to those students without a plan.



**I wish we had more like a step-by-step plan, because there's a lot of broad plans telling us what we should do, like get good grades and then do good on those tests to get to the colleges. I wish there was like a step-by-step plan of how like what classes look better for a certain degree, like what classes would lead you to where you want to go, not just something like everyone can do, but a step for you as a person."**

- High School Junior

### Students in College and Career Coursework are More Likely to Have Comprehensive Pathway Plans

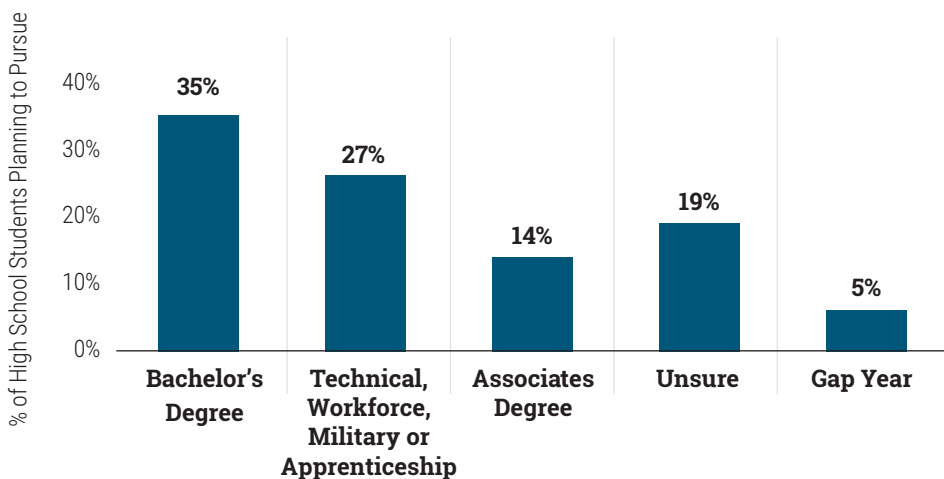


## 6. More than half of students have a post-high school next step in mind.

The most common anticipated next step for current students for life after graduation is pursuing a four-year bachelor's degree. However, this represents only 35% of current high school students. If we group both associate degrees and bachelor's degrees together, 49% of students plan to attend a college or university.

This means that half of high school students are considering alternatives or remain uncertain about what they will do post-graduation. About a quarter of students anticipate pursuing a career focused pathway (joining the military, starting an apprenticeship, entering the workforce or pursuing a technical certification). Additionally, about one in five students are unsure of what they will do after graduation and are either considering multiple options or do not know what they will do.

### Most High School Students Are Planning to Pursue Something Other than a Bachelor's Degree After Graduating



### WHAT IS THE BEST THING YOUR SCHOOL DID TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE PREPARED TO SUCCEED AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?



It held conferences for students to meet representatives from different colleges."

They made sure that the requirements were matched up with my college preference."

Advised me to take courses for college credit and apply for scholarships."

- Recent High School Graduates

As discussed in Finding 2, students perceive that access to career focused preparation courses is limited despite these pathways being the second-most common plan for current high school students. Two out of every 10 students surveyed report that work-based learning, CTE courses and industry credentials were not available at their school. However, they report that honors classes and other college preparation programs are nearly universally available.

Furthermore, while more than half of recent graduates say they received information on college and career outcomes while in high school, their open-ended responses indicate this information focused on college preparation rather than career preparation.

# Recommendations

Based on our findings from the survey, interviews and focus groups, we propose five recommendations that will improve Florida's K-12 college and career planning system. These recommendations fall into two broad categories: (1) data availability & access and (2) work-based learning opportunities & supports.

Implementing these policies will enhance parents' and teachers' ability to support students as they consider the next chapter of their lives after high school. They will improve current students' ability to identify programs that match their professional preferences. Furthermore, these recommendations will expand the opportunities for students to gain critical real-world experience by participating in work-based learning opportunities.

## DATA AVAILABILITY & ACCESS

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### 1. Make school-level and district-level Xello usage data publicly available.

Making Xello usage data publicly available will further increase transparency and encourage schools to use the system. It also provides an important feedback loop for policymakers who have invested in the platform. Currently, it is unclear how districts and schools are using the platform. Based on our focus groups, many schools and districts introduced Xello to eighth graders when the platform became available across the state for the 2023-24 school year. Yet, it is unclear how the platform, which is available to all K-12 students, is being used across the education continuum. Having this data publicly available will allow policymakers and stakeholders to better understand how schools are implementing the platform and empower schools to better support their students in college and career planning.

### 2. Combine access to pathways planning and the data dashboard.

As the state considers how best to fulfill the data dashboard requirement set out by the 2021 REACH Act, policymakers should consider embedding Florida's future data dashboard within the Xello platform. This integration would provide parents and students with direct access to critical information—much of which students report not receiving at school—within the same tool they use to create their postsecondary pathways plans. Co-locating these services creates a win-win: students seeking information about programs within the platform are more likely to develop comprehensive plans, and students already creating plans are more likely to explore the available information.

### 3. Make the results of Florida's CTE Audit publicly accessible.

Florida's [CTE Audit](#) is an annual review of secondary and postsecondary CTE programs, assessing their alignment with state quality frameworks, the relevance of credentials on the Master Credential List and their effectiveness in addressing workforce needs. The audit provides actionable data to districts and schools, offering insights to improve program quality and better serve students.

Survey results indicate that parents and students value information on program outcomes, such as employment rates and wages, which the CTE Audit is well-positioned to provide. Making this data publicly accessible in a user-friendly format would greatly enhance its impact.

Additionally, integrating CTE Audit findings into platforms like Xello or future state dashboards would allow students and families to compare program quality, cost and career outcomes. This aligns with the goals of the 2021 REACH Act and ensures students are equipped to make informed decisions about their education and career pathways.

## WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES & SUPPORTS

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### 4. Engage businesses and intermediaries in the planning process.

Incentivize personalized career advisement supports and work-based learning opportunities by creating public-private partnerships with local businesses and intermediary organizations. To accomplish this, the state should:

- Provide a match for the formation or use of intermediary organizations to strengthen business and K-12 engagement, such as the deployment of career coaches or offering work-based learning experiences. Intermediaries bring together partners to identify local workforce needs, develop and implement solutions and raise funds to support education-to-workforce efforts
- Prioritize schools with demonstrated commitment to Xello implementation.
- Incentivize teachers to develop and support intermediaries and work-based learning experiences.

A matching program would be mutually beneficial to businesses, students and teachers. Businesses gain direct access to building the talent pipeline and potential future employees. Students get to learn critical skills on the job that better prepare them for life after high school. And teachers can act as critical supports, providing materials and training to businesses and being the much-needed bridge between K-12 and business.

### SEMINOLE COUNTY: CAREER EXPLORATION WITH INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

Seminole County integrates career exploration early, starting in elementary school with interest-based lessons and expanding to mandatory career plans in middle school. High school students refine these plans through a “3E” framework—Enrollment, Enlistment or Employment. Local industry partners play a key role by sponsoring the district’s “What’s Your E?” campaign and providing opportunities for CTE teachers and counselors to tour businesses through professional learning events. These initiatives empower educators to offer students personalized guidance about local career options, supported by firsthand industry knowledge.

## 5. Leverage state and local governments as venues for work-based learning opportunities.

Government, whether local, state or federal, is the largest employer in 61 of Florida's 67 counties and is a top five employer in every county.<sup>1</sup> The wide-ranging jobs that the government provides, from teachers to scientists, police officers to engineers, offer a perfect place to for students to access work-based learning opportunities. This is especially true in rural areas where work-based learning may be more limited compared to larger urban areas. Students should have the opportunity to gain experience and knowledge from them. Utilize summer stipends for teachers to develop guidelines and support for implementation.

1 [Florida's Top Public Employers by County, Florida Tax Watch 2020](#)

# Conclusion

Florida continues to be a national leader in aligning its K-12, postsecondary and workforce systems to best prepare secondary students for life after graduation. The findings in this report highlight areas where Florida can continue to push ahead and ensure that students have clear, accessible and relevant data as they plan for college or a career.

One of the biggest challenges that current students, parents and recent graduates all experience when planning for life after high school is a lack of information. The recent adoption of Xello as the state's college and career pathway planning tool has the potential to remedy this challenge. Respondents that used the platform report feeling better prepared and more confident about their future plans. Yet, early adoption of the platform remains low.

The state should incentivize schools to integrate the tool more rigorously into their college and career advising programs. Additionally, making usage data publicly available would enhance transparency, allowing policymakers, parents and the public to evaluate how effectively the platform is being implemented. This increased accountability can help ensure that Xello fulfills its promise of empowering students with the information and support they need to achieve their postsecondary and career goals.

Additionally, strong pathways programs such as CTE and work-based learning are valuable tools when preparing students for college or a career. The state should continue to match the accessibility of these programs to those of college preparation programs that are nearly ubiquitous across high school campus.

Finally, as the state evaluates different data dashboards that are available to students and families, they need to consider the information that parents and students find most helpful. Integrating data on the program time requirements, costs and outcomes into Xello will simplify post-secondary pathways planning.

By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, Florida has the opportunity to further solidify its leadership in college and career readiness. These efforts will not only enhance individual student outcomes but also strengthen Florida's workforce and economic competitiveness for years to come.

