Portrait to Practice

How States Turn Vision into Infrastructure for Student Success

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DURABLE SKILLS

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Executive Summary

Across the country, communities are building Portraits of a Graduate grounded in a powerful consensus: that durable skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and adaptability are essential to academic achievement and long-term economic mobility. Twenty-six states and hundreds of districts have formalized these visions. But a portrait alone does not change what happens in classrooms. This report presents the findings of a 50-state policy scan examining the enabling conditions that allow portrait visions to translate into practice, conducted by America Succeeds between late 2025 and early 2026. The scan assessed 22 state-level policy and leadership conditions across six categories: Portrait Vision, College and Career Readiness, Applied Learning Opportunities, Competency-Based Education, Graduation Requirements, and Accountability Systems. The resulting framework is designed for state policymakers, education leaders, and local educators working to move portrait visions from aspiration to action. Two findings anchor the report.

The infrastructure of possibility exists everywhere, but its power depends on coherence.

Every state in the scan has some form of enabling infrastructure in place, whether through flexible instructional time definitions, postsecondary outcomes, or applied learning funding. But in many states, that infrastructure is incomplete, and no single enabling condition transforms learning on its own. A portrait vision without aligned graduation requirements sends mixed signals about what readiness actually means. Applied learning opportunities without dedicated funding remain dependent on grant cycles and individual initiative. Competency-based credit policies without published guidance for how mastery is determined leave districts to build assessment systems from scratch. The states making the strongest progress are those where multiple conditions compound upon one another: where applied learning opportunities are funded and measured, where competency-based education is supported by implementation networks and technical assistance that build district capacity, and where graduation expectations and accountability metrics align with the skills a state's portrait calls for. This report calls that coherence an infrastructure of possibility, and the states highlighted throughout illustrate what it looks like in practice.

Educators are leading this work, but state policy determines its reach.

The Research Practice Collaborative, a two-year America Succeeds study of schools across the nation, documents extraordinary examples of educators and communities activating portrait visions through authentic, career-connected learning. Students are earning industry credentials, defending capstone projects, and developing the combination of academic, durable, and technical skills that prepare them for economic mobility. But without state-level enabling conditions, that work remains dependent on individual champions and isolated in the schools fortunate enough to have them. Notably, all 50 states already have instructional time definitions flexible enough for applied learning to count, a lever every district leader can use immediately. But the broader enabling conditions are what determine whether portrait-aligned learning reaches every student or only a few.

What Policymakers Can Do Next

States can accelerate the shift from vision to practice by investing in portrait implementation supports, aligning graduation requirements and accountability systems with portrait competencies, and building sustainable applied learning infrastructure with dedicated funding, equity supports, and employer incentives. When these elements compound upon one another as a coherent system, Portraits of a Graduate move from aspiration to reality, creating an infrastructure of possibility in which every learner can develop the academic, durable, and technical skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing economy and pursue lasting economic mobility.

Introduction

Across the country, communities are reimagining what it means for a student to be ready for life after high school. In hundreds of districts and twenty-six states, educators, employers, families, and students have come together to build Portraits of a Graduate grounded in a powerful consensus: that durable skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and adaptability are not secondary to academic achievement but essential to it.

In many communities, that vision is already reshaping classrooms. Students defend capstone projects before community panels, earn industry-recognized credentials through career pathways, and develop a combination of academic, durable, and technical skills that unlock economic mobility and lifelong opportunity. The ability to collaborate and code, to think critically and operate precision equipment, and to communicate persuasively and manage complex projects, built on a robust foundation of content knowledge, is what prepares students for their first job and every opportunity that follows.

Yet the reach of that work, who it touches, how deep it goes, and whether it endures, depends significantly on the policy and support infrastructure that states build around it. When states align graduation requirements, accountability systems, funding streams, and learning experiences with the visions their communities have articulated, they create an infrastructure of possibility in which portrait-aligned learning can move from isolated practice to systemic expectation.

The demand for durable skills is well-documented. Of the 82 million U.S. job postings analyzed in Durable by Design, a 2025 America Succeeds study of Lightcast labor market data, 70 percent of the most in-demand skills were durable skills. World Economic Forum survey data echoes that finding: as AI and automation reshape the labor market, employees with strong durable skills will be sought after for years to come. Yet employer confidence in graduate readiness remains low. A General Assembly survey of U.S. and UK company Vice Presidents found that only 18% of U.S. leaders reported entry-level employees were very or completely prepared, with weak durable skills cited as the primary gap. An Intelligent.com survey of 966 business leaders found that only 25% of companies hiring recent college graduates reported that those hires worked out well, with lack of motivation, poor communication skills, lack of professionalism, struggles with feedback, and inadequate problem-solving cited most frequently as the reasons why.

The challenge is no longer awareness. It is infrastructure. If we want learners to thrive in a rapidly changing economy, we must build systems that intentionally develop, assess, and signal durable skills from early education through postsecondary pathways. Creating Portrait of a Graduate visions is a strong starting point, but to move from aspiration to impact, states must align the levers at their disposal to make durable skills part of the structure of education, not an add-on.

When a state develops a portrait, it is doing more than naming a set of competencies. It is setting a clear expectation that every student will graduate with the academic, durable, and technical skills required to thrive beyond high school. Skill development is not the end goal in itself. It is the foundation for the broader purpose of the work: ensuring that graduates are prepared to succeed in the workforce and access long-term economic mobility. But without deliberate policy and leadership alignment, portraits risk remaining aspirational, disconnected from the structures that shape what students actually do and how they are assessed.

This report focuses on state-level enabling conditions, but it does not contend that these must be in place to achieve durable skills development. Local educators and leaders have an arsenal of tools that can be used to develop learners' durable skills and prepare them for life after high school, whether or not their state has deliberately built the infrastructure around them. One finding of this scan reinforces that point: **all 50 states** have instructional time definitions flexible enough for applied learning opportunities, including work-based learning, youth apprenticeships, and career-connected experiences, to count toward required instructional hours. Every educator and district leader in the country already has this lever at their disposal. However, the opportunity for states to build on that foundation and create the environment for portrait-aligned work to reach every student is clear and attainable.

This report examines the infrastructure that helps turn portraits into practice. Specifically, it asks: what state-level enabling conditions can be enacted for Portrait of a Graduate visions to meaningfully influence what happens in classrooms, schools, and communities? The resulting framework is designed to reveal not just which individual conditions are present, but the degree to which a state's enabling conditions compound upon one another to function as a coherent system in which portrait visions, graduation expectations, learning opportunities, and accountability measures reinforce one another. State policymakers and education leaders can use it to assess how fully they have aligned the levers at their disposal. Local leaders and educators can use it to identify the policies in their state that create space for portrait-aligned learning, and to understand where that space does not yet exist.

Definitions

Refer to Appendix B for a more detailed set of definitions, including examples for some of these terms.

ALO: Applied Learning Opportunity, which we define as Dual/Concurrent Enrollment, Work-Based Learning/ Youth Apprenticeship, and Industry-Recognized Credential attainment opportunities.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) / Mastery-Based Education / Proficiency-Based Education: These terms describe the same general approach to teaching, learning, and crediting, in which students progress and earn credit by demonstrating that they have learned the material rather than by completing a set number of instructional hours.

CCR: College and Career Readiness.

Dual Enrollment / Concurrent Enrollment: Both terms describe arrangements in which high school students take college-level courses and earn postsecondary credit while still enrolled in high school.

Durable Skills: In an era when technical skills are evolving at an unprecedented pace, there is an important set of durable 'soft skills' that last throughout an entire career. This includes a combination of how we use what we know – critical thinking, communication, collaboration – and how we show up in the world – leadership, resilience, self-awareness.

Enabling Condition: State policies or published guidance that enable learners to develop durable skills and meaningfully prepare themselves for life after high school. Each enabling condition was determined as present, partially present, or not present based on the evidence available in these sources.

ICAP: Individual Career and Academic Plan, which is a plan developed by a learner, often in middle school or at the beginning of 9th grade, that helps the learner connect their coursework, experiences, and skill development to postsecondary and career goals.

IRC: Industry-Recognized Credential, which is a certification, license, or other formal credential issued by or aligned to the standards of an industry or professional organization that validates a student's technical skills in a specific field.

"PoG" or "Portrait": Portrait (or Profile) of a Graduate.

Seat Time / Carnegie Unit: The traditional method of measuring student progress and awarding credit based on the number of hours a student spends in a classroom rather than on what they have learned.

WBL: Work-Based Learning.

Policy Scan Framework Overview

For the purpose of this research, we focused on six key categories of enabling policy and state leadership conditions that are critical to driving this change. These enabling conditions categories are:

Enabling Condition Category	Description
Portrait Vision	Whether the state has adopted a portrait or profile that articulates durable skills expectations.
College and Career Readiness	Policies related to individualized academic and career planning and data collection on high school graduates' outcomes.
Applied Learning Opportunities	Policies related to state supports for work-based learning and youth apprenticeships, dual and concurrent enrollment, and industry-recognized credential attainment.
Competency-Based Education	Policies related to flexible instructional time definitions, competency-based credit allowance, and state guidance for implementation of CBE.
Graduation Requirements	Policies related to offering multiple distinct diploma options, the integration of durable skills and ALOs into graduation requirements, and options for demonstrating college and career readiness.
Accountability Systems	Policies related to the inclusion of college and career readiness indicators in accountability formulas, the measurement of ALOs in those indicators, and locally-developed measures in state accountability frameworks.

Within each of the categories, we defined multiple enabling conditions and conducted a 50-state scan to assess their presence across the states. These conditions are a mixture of policy levers that enable and incentivize meaningful change at the local level, and state leadership levers that support local capacity to implement portrait-aligned learning experiences and assessments. When a state combines the right set of policy conditions with a high level of implementation support, it fully enables districts and schools to transform educational practices and place durable skills development at the center of students' learning experiences. We selected each of the enabling conditions within these categories because it either directly supports students' skill development, directly affects their ability to succeed beyond high school, or builds the capacity of a state system that is required to translate a portrait from vision into action in the classroom.

These criteria for selecting enabling conditions are articulated below:

1. Directly supports the development of students' durable skills.
2. Directly supports a student's ability to access and thrive in postsecondary education or workforce settings.
3. Creates a function in education systems that supports the achievement of either of the two criteria above.

Refer to Appendix A to see detailed reasoning for each enabling condition's presence in the scan.

National Findings Data

The scan examined 22 enabling conditions across all 50 states. Some of these conditions lend themselves to straightforward national counts (e.g., a state either requires an individual career and academic plan or it does not). Others involve more complex policy landscapes where the answer depends on the depth, scope, and design of a state's approach, making a simple tally less meaningful than the nuance behind it. The seven national data points presented below represent the conditions where state-level totals provide a clear and useful picture of where the country stands. The sections that follow explore the fuller complexity of the scan's findings through state highlights, cross-cutting analysis, and the connection between enabling conditions and classroom practice.

Enabling Condition	# of States with Condition Established
Is the state's skills vision in Portrait form?	26
Does the state require students to develop an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP), or a similar plan for learning in high school that helps students connect their secondary coursework with their postsecondary plans?	39
Is there flexibility within the state's definition of instructional time for work-based learning, youth apprenticeships, or credential programs within CTE pathways to count towards instructional time?	50
Does the state outline or articulate distinctions between diploma pathways that reflect different coursework, specialization, or career vs college pathways?	25
Does the state require all students to demonstrate the acquisition of durable skills as a part of meeting graduation requirements?	7
Does the state include a CCR metric or indicator in its accountability formula?	36
Does the state allow for locally-developed indicators in its accountability system?	5

State Highlights

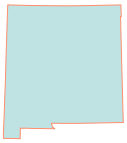
The 50-state scan produced a detailed picture of where enabling conditions are present and where they are absent. This section highlights states that have enacted multiple enabling conditions within a single category with a level of quality and coherence that merits attention. These are not necessarily states that have enacted every condition in a given category. They are states whose policies reflect a deliberate effort to create the environment in which educators, employers, and communities can bring portrait-aligned learning to life, whether through policies that require or incentivize portrait-aligned learning experiences, create flexibility for portrait-aligned classroom instruction, provide clear implementation guidance, or some combination of the three.

These highlights are intended to serve as models, not rankings. Each featured state offers a concrete example of how the enabling conditions in a given category can work together as a coherent system, one that expands access to the combination of academic, durable, and technical skills development that prepares students for economic mobility and lifelong opportunity.

Policymakers and education leaders can use these examples to assess what comparable infrastructure might look like in their own state context, and local leaders and educators can use them to better understand the policy landscape that supports the innovative practices they are working to bring into their schools and communities.

1. Portrait Vision[1]

North Carolina
North Carolina's process for creating their portrait was robust in the manner and breadth of stakeholder engagement it undertook, and the process is thoroughly described on its website. North Carolina engaged nearly 1,200 stakeholders from across the state to gather feedback. They organized stakeholders from K-12 education, students, families, businesses, non-profits, and higher education into multiple design teams, that collaborated over three months to determine the competencies on the portrait.



New Mexico
New Mexico is one of the few states that has not created a statewide portrait (they call them graduate profiles), but instead passed a law (NM HB 171 (2024)) that requires all districts to create their own graduate profile. To support districts in meeting this requirement, state leaders published a detailed guidance document on why portraits are important, required elements and recommended practices, required design specifications, and recommendations for leading an inclusive design process with community stakeholders.

2. College and Career Readiness

Colorado
The Colorado Department of Education has integrated "essential skills" (durable skills) into the Colorado Academic Standards with learning expectations across four performance levels, making them actionable for districts rather than aspirational. Colorado's Essential Skills framework functions as a throughline connecting the Colorado vision for college and career readiness, the academic standards, and the career planning process. Colorado requires all students to develop ICAPs to graduate from high school. Students are mandated to update ICAPs on an annual basis. Colorado publishes postsecondary enrollment and outcome data

1 This section is unique from others because this report does not intend to determine which states have built "better" portraits than others. There is no hierarchy of vision statements. While some states have invested more heavily in polished portrait webpages or professionally designed documents, the importance of a portrait does not reside in the document itself. A portrait's value lies in two things: 1) In the process through which the state engaged a broad set of diverse stakeholders in determining the competencies of the portrait vision. 2) In the process through which the state uses its portrait vision to determine educational strategy and align learning experiences to the skills on its portrait, which is captured in the other sections below. That being said, two states stand out for their different approaches to realizing high-quality portrait visions and providing portrait-development supports for districts.

for their high school graduates and disaggregates that data by the type of programs high school graduates participated in during high school. Taken together, these measures create a structured system for students in which durable skills are embedded in the learning process throughout high school, and students can understand which programs and learning experiences in high school are most likely to lead to positive outcomes for them in postsecondary education or the workforce.

North Carolina

North Carolina has developed one of the more impressive CCR support systems in the nation, specifically as it relates to publishing supporting resources to augment the implementation of their portrait. They have published detailed grade-banded rubrics, I-can statements, T-charts, and performance tasks for the skills on their portrait, alongside a portrait playbook to support educators and administrators in integrating these skills into educational experiences. They require all students to develop a "career development plan" (ICAP equivalent) that includes a self-assessment of skills and career interests, a career pathway plan in accordance with that self-assessment, and alignment of their course and program-taking plans in high school to their career pathway plan. Additionally, they publish multiple pieces of data on high school graduates' postsecondary enrollment and outcomes. Students in North Carolina are fully empowered to understand college and career pathways and develop durable skills aligned to those pathways.

3. Applied Learning Opportunities

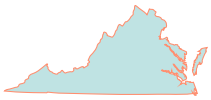
Massachusetts

Massachusetts has invested heavily in applied learning through one of the more expansive grant ecosystems we studied in this scan. Massachusetts channels tens of millions of dollars annually into dual enrollment, work-based learning, and career pathway programming. In 2026, the state dedicated over $8 million in Early College grants, over $15 million in Dual Enrollment Subsidies, over $6 million through the School to Career Connecting Activities program for work-based learning placements, and $4.5 million in Innovation Career Pathways Implementation Grants, collectively ensuring that districts have resources to build career-connected experiences across multiple pathways. The state addresses equity in access to ALOs through the Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Partnership, which provides the first courses free for students outside Early College programs, and through YouthWorks, a state-funded employment program that provides paid work experiences, skills training, and career exploration specifically for young people at risk of chronic unemployment. What makes Massachusetts particularly noteworthy is the deliberate nature of how these investments are directed. The Connecting Activities grant, for example, explicitly requires districts to align work-based learning placements with students' career plans and to prioritize placements in high-wage, high-demand fields. Students in Massachusetts are supported by a funding infrastructure that connects applied learning directly to the economic mobility outcomes that portrait visions are designed to achieve.

Montana

Montana has built an impressive and innovative applied learning funding system that layers multiple funding mechanisms on top of each other to create a comprehensive infrastructure for applied learning access. The Advanced Opportunities Act provides districts with a permanent, formula-based funding stream to support dual enrollment, work-based learning, credential programs, and other experiential learning opportunities, with 75% of those funds required to go toward reducing costs that students and families would otherwise pay out of pocket. The state supplements this with weighted CTE funding distributed in part based on student participation in workforce-development activities like apprenticeships and industry certifications. Beginning in 2028, Montana's Future Ready Payments will reward districts

when their graduates earn postsecondary or CTE-equivalent credits before graduation, with work-based learning experiences explicitly included in that credit definition. On the employer side, the state reimburses businesses for added workers' compensation costs when they hire students for work-based learning and provides apprenticeship tax credits for new hires. The Montana University System's One-Two-Free program gives every high school student their first two dual enrollment courses at no cost, with reduced rates and hardship scholarships available for additional courses. Montana's approach is distinctive because these mechanisms are designed to work as a system: covering student costs, incentivizing districts, rewarding outcomes, and lowering barriers for employer engagement in high school WBL so that durable and technical skill development is accessible to all students and treated as core educational infrastructure.



Virginia

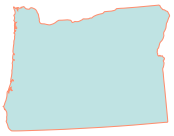
Virginia has built an applied learning funding system that addresses multiple dimensions of ALO access through dedicated, permanent funding streams. The state funds applied learning primarily through five CTE State Entitlement Grants, supported by lottery revenue, that cover equipment, industry certification exam costs, and STEM-Health Sciences credential preparation. One of these funding streams is particularly distinctive: the Workplace Readiness Skills Examinations appropriation directly subsidizes the cost of administering a durable skills assessment, making it one of the only state-funded mechanisms in the nation that treats durable skills measurement as a line item rather than a local expense. Dual enrollment is funded through a cost-sharing model in which community colleges charge school divisions no more than 40% of standard tuition, and a JLARC review found that 94% of school divisions reported receiving sufficient state and local funding to cover their dual enrollment costs. The College and Career Ready Virginia Program, established by HB2455, requires community colleges to provide dual enrollment counselors in high schools and ensures that credits earned transfer toward postsecondary credentials at public institutions. To ensure the supply of qualified instructors keeps pace with student demand for college-level coursework, the General Assembly appropriated $350,000 annually from the general fund for teacher credentialing scholarships, with lifetime awards of up to $12,000 per teacher pursuing dual enrollment or industry credential teaching qualifications. On the employer side, the HIRED Apprenticeship Fund offers $4,000 per new apprentice for training and program infrastructure, plus $2,000 for supportive services covering transportation, uniforms, tools, and childcare, and the ExTRA program provides technical assistance and grant funding to help employers develop and register apprenticeship programs. Virginia's ALO infrastructure is comprehensive, not because of a single large investment but because it funds applied learning at every stage: ensuring instructors are credentialed, keeping student costs low, incentivizing employers to open their doors, and creating the conditions for durable and technical skill development to be accessible across the state.

4. Competency-Based Education

Idaho

Idaho has built a comprehensive competency-based education infrastructure, grounded in the Idaho Mastery Education Network (IMEN) and supported by a suite of implementation resources that make CBE accessible to districts at varying stages of implementation. The state defines instructional time broadly by including "instructionally related activities" in the definition, creating flexibility for work-based learning and other applied experiences to count toward required hours. Students can earn credit by demonstrating mastery of content standards as defined by their local education agency, and the state has published detailed guidance for how districts can award credit through mastery

demonstration, including considerations for evidence collection and validation. What sets Idaho apart is the depth of its implementation support. The state has published a mastery-based education framework, a staging guide that helps districts assess where they are in the transition to CBE and identify next steps, and a full resource library designed to lower the implementation burden for schools that lack the capacity to design these systems from scratch. Idaho's CBE infrastructure is also integrated into the state's broader portrait and graduation framework, connecting mastery-based crediting directly to the CCR Competencies and the forthcoming Future Readiness Project graduation requirement (beginning with the class of 2028).



Oregon

Oregon has established a competency-based education system that is both broadly permissive and carefully structured. The state defines instructional time to include any time students are engaged in learning activities designed to meet academic content standards under the direction of a licensed teacher or instructor. This definition of instructional time provides flexibility and affirms that learning counts when it happens in workplaces and community settings. Oregon requires districts to offer credit by proficiency or mastery through multiple pathways, including classroom work, exams, portfolios, documentation of prior learning, and work designed to measure mastery, where hours of instruction may vary. The state's credit options rule is particularly notable for the range of evidence it accepts, from collections of student work to certifications, awards, and documentation of prior experiences, giving districts a broad but, critically, clearly defined menu for validating student learning. Oregon has also published detailed proficiency-based teaching and learning guidance to support districts in implementing these approaches. The result is a CBE infrastructure that creates real space for the kinds of applied, student-directed learning experiences that develop academic, durable, and technical skills simultaneously, while providing enough structure that districts can implement mastery-based approaches with confidence that they are meeting state expectations.

5. Graduation Requirements

Colorado

Colorado has designed its graduation requirements to give students meaningful flexibility in how they demonstrate readiness for life after high school. The state offers diploma endorsements, including a STEM-endorsed diploma, a seal of biliteracy, and a seal of climate literacy, and enables districts to create additional pathways that incentivize differentiated and applied learning. Students can demonstrate college and career readiness through a Menu of College and Career-Ready Demonstrations that goes well beyond standardized tests, including district-designed capstones, industry certificates, and standards-based performance assessments that allow for both student choice and local design. Youth apprenticeships count for 1.5 units of course credit per semester, and work-based learning can count toward graduation through the industry certificate CCR demonstration option. While Colorado does not require a standalone demonstration of durable skills to graduate, these skills are embedded into the state's academic standards, meaning that the pathways students use to demonstrate readiness inherently involve the application of durable skills in authentic contexts. Colorado's graduation framework is notable for the degree of choice it provides: students and districts can shape a graduation experience that reflects local workforce needs and individual career goals while still meeting a consistent statewide standard for readiness.

Indiana

Indiana has restructured its graduation requirements around a framework that makes durable skills demonstration unavoidable. They are one of only seven states in the nation to make durable skills demonstration a requirement for graduation (the others are Idaho, Michigan, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Vermont), and that requirement isn't active yet in Idaho or Oregon. Every student must meet three requirements to graduate: earn a high school diploma, learn and demonstrate employability skills, and demonstrate postsecondary-ready competencies. These graduation pathways allow for personalization; students are enabled to choose which demonstration option they want to pursue in each one. What makes this framework distinctive is the second requirement. Every Indiana student must demonstrate employability skills through one of three options: project-based learning, service-based learning, or work-based learning. This is one of the clearest examples in the scan of a state that has moved durable skills from an aspirational goal into a structural learning expectation. The postsecondary-ready competencies requirement offers its own set of applied options, including industry credentials, federally recognized apprenticeships, CTE concentrator status, dual credit, and locally created pathways. Work-based learning counts toward both the employability skills requirement and course credit, with 75 hours earning one credit, and the state's Modern Youth Apprenticeship program combines apprenticeships with dual credit courses so that students earn work experience alongside both high school and college credit. Students in Indiana graduate having not only learned about durable skills but also demonstrated them through authentic, career-connected experiences. The work Indiana has done in this regard is powerful, and other states should look to it as a model for operationalizing a portrait vision.

Maryland

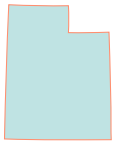
Maryland offers two diploma endorsements, College Ready and Career and Technical Education, that allow students to differentiate themselves based on the specialized coursework and programs they complete. Maryland has designed one of the more comprehensive and student-centered approaches to college and career readiness demonstration in the nation, structured around the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Students can demonstrate CCR through multiple routes beyond standardized assessments, including industry-recognized credentials, registered apprenticeships, dual enrollment coursework, and qualifying AP or IB exam scores. Under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future framework, students can satisfy an initial CCR determination, typically by the end of 10th grade, through either academic success paired with math mastery or by meeting benchmark scores on English and math assessments. What makes Maryland's system distinctive is what happens after that determination. Students who meet the CCR standard gain access to Post-CCR Pathways at no cost, including dual enrollment courses, CTE programs leading to credentials or apprenticeships, and competitive-entry college preparatory programs, with local education agencies required to fund a minimum of two dual enrollment courses per semester. Students who have not yet met the standard enter a CCR Support Pathway that provides individualized interventions alongside initial access to Post-CCR Pathways and introductory CTE courses, ensuring the system functions as an accelerator for all students rather than a gate that separates them. Work-based learning counts toward both course credit and the CTE endorsement, and students can earn credit through apprenticeship programs, work study, and internships that demonstrate pre-established curricular objectives. Maryland's graduation framework is notable not for any single condition but for the way it sequences the student experience: an early readiness determination that sets students on differentiated pathways, universal access to applied learning regardless of which pathway a student enters, and multiple routes to demonstrating readiness that value career-connected experience alongside academic achievement.

6. Accountability Systems

The three states highlighted below are the only three states that have enacted each of the three enabling conditions in the Accountability Systems category.

New Hampshire

New Hampshire is one of a select group of states in the scan where the accountability system is designed to recognize and incentivize the full range of applied learning experiences that portrait visions call for. The state's College and Career Readiness indicator includes measures of dual enrollment course completion, CTE program completion, approved apprenticeship completion, and industry-recognized credential attainment, making it one of the more comprehensive CCR indicators in the nation. What makes New Hampshire especially notable is the combination of this indicator with its local accountability provision. Ed 306.19 requires each school district to establish a local education accountability system that may integrate with the state's system, creating a mechanism for districts to develop and track measures that reflect their own portrait-aligned goals while maintaining comparability with statewide data. This two-tier structure, a robust statewide CCR indicator paired with locally designed accountability measures, is particularly powerful in the context of New Hampshire's broader commitment to competency-based education. Districts that have built strong mastery-based learning models can demonstrate the impact of those models through an accountability system that is structured to see and value what they are doing, rather than one that overlooks it in favor of narrower metrics.



Utah

Utah's accountability system is designed to capture both statewide readiness priorities and locally meaningful measures of student success. The state's Postsecondary Readiness indicator measures the percentage of students who meet the ACT College Readiness Benchmark alongside those who earn a C or better in at least one Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or concurrent enrollment course, or who complete all courses required in a CTE pathway. By including concurrent enrollment and CTE pathway completion, which incorporates work-based learning requirements, the accountability formula directly values the applied learning experiences where students prepare for their post-secondary endeavours and develop durable and technical skills in combination. Utah also permits schools to include up to two additional locally-chosen quality indicators on their school report cards, provided they are approved by the State Superintendent. This means that districts with strong portrait-aligned learning models can surface outcomes that reflect their communities' goals rather than being evaluated entirely on measures that were not designed with their specific students in mind. Utah's accountability system sends a clear signal that readiness is not defined by test scores alone, and that the applied, career-connected learning experiences at the heart of the portrait movement are worth measuring and rewarding.

Texas

Texas' accountability system is structured to value applied learning outcomes at both the state and local levels. The state's College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) indicator is built directly into the A-F accountability ratings that determine how schools are evaluated, sending an unambiguous signal that readiness beyond academic achievement is a statewide priority. The CCMR indicator measures dual credit course completion, earning an Associate Degree, industry-based certifications, CTE completion, and military enlistment, among other things, capturing the range of pathways through which students develop both durable and technical skills that prepare them for life after high school. Texas supplements this statewide measure with a Local Accountability System (LAS), authorized by HB 22 (2017), that allows and encourages districts to choose locally determined measures to be included in a campus's official state accountability rating. This structure gives districts the flexibility to surface

outcomes that reflect their own Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)-aligned priorities while ensuring that every school in the state is held accountable for producing graduates who are ready for college, careers, or military service. The result is an accountability framework that functions as a baseline expectation for career-connected outcomes statewide and an open door for districts to go further in measuring what matters most to their communities.

Critically Enabled Practices

The State Highlights section illustrates what strong enabling conditions look like at the state policy level. But policy does not teach students. Educators, school leaders, employers, and communities do. This section turns from the policy landscape to the practice landscape, drawing on the Research Practice Collaborative (RPC), a two-year research project led by America Succeeds involving 12 high schools across the nation. The RPC studied schools that have embraced durable and technical skill development and identified the conditions and factors that foster that development effectively. The findings offer a window into what practices and systems are strengthened on the ground when the enabling conditions described in this report are present, and when dedicated practitioners put them to use.

Each subsection below pairs a high-quality practice or system documented in the RPC research with the enabling conditions in that category, showing how the combination of those conditions creates the environment in which that practice can take root, reach more students, and endure.

1. Portrait Vision

The RPC found that schools that develop durable skills most effectively share a critical starting point: a clear, community-owned framework that names the skills students are expected to build and gives everyone in the system a shared language for talking about growth. At Batesville High School, that framework emerged from a three-year Portrait of a Graduate process involving parents, employers, educators, and students. The result was not a generic skills list but a framework with deep local legitimacy, anchored in what the Batesville community actually valued for its graduates. That legitimacy is what allowed the portrait to function as a living organizing principle, shaping curriculum, advising, and assessment rather than sitting as a mission statement on a website.

Educators, like those in Batesville, built legitimacy in their portrait framework through sustained community engagement. That work is far more likely to take root and spread in states that have developed a statewide portrait and modeled how community engagement can create visions that become more than words on paper. A state that espouses a clear skills vision for graduates gives districts something to build from and align to. A state that formalizes that vision as a Portrait of a Graduate, developed with meaningful stakeholder engagement, models the process and raises the standard for what community involvement looks like. And a state that provides specific guidance for districts to create their own portraits extends the reach of that model to communities that lack the resources or experience to build it from scratch. When those conditions are present together, the portrait becomes what the RPC shows it needs to be: not a compliance document but the conceptual foundation that makes intentional durable skills development coherent across a system.

2. College and Career Readiness

One of the more striking findings in the RPC is how consistently authentic career experience produced academic, durable, and technical skill development along with genuine, informed self-knowledge in students. Cedar Falls CAPS students who rotated through three different teaching placements arrived at a level of career clarity that most high schoolers never reach. One student could articulate not just that she wanted to teach, but also that she preferred general education over special education, younger grades over older ones, and why. Another described the program as confirming that teaching was the right path for her in a way that no interest inventory or classroom discussion could have. That kind of clarity matters enormously for postsecondary persistence, because students who know what they are pursuing and why are far more likely to stay the course.

Programs like Cedar Falls CAPS are built by educators who design meaningful career experiences for their

students, but the enabling conditions in the CCR category are what create the policy infrastructure for those experiences to be supported systemwide and for their outcomes to be tracked. When a state collects and reports postsecondary outcomes at the school and district level, it creates feedback loops that reveal whether graduates are actually transitioning successfully, not just graduating. When a state requires students to develop an Individual Career and Academic Plan, it creates a structure for students to connect their coursework and experiences to a future they are actively building. But the RPC makes clear that those plans are only as meaningful as the experiences they are built around. States where both conditions are present, and where the ICAP is understood as a living tool tied to real applied learning rather than a one-time form, come closest to enabling what Cedar Falls CAPS demonstrates is possible.

3. Applied Learning Opportunities

Across all twelve schools in the RPC study, the single most consistent driver of durable skills development was authentic experience in real-world contexts with genuine stakes. This was true regardless of school size, geography, population, or resources. GO CAPS Monett students attended school inside hospitals, elementary schools, and farms – rather than simulating those environments in a classroom – and the outcomes reflected that intensity: students like Maci developed the combination of technical expertise and durable skills that the labor market rewards, earning full EMT certification while building the professional identity, communication skills, and confidence to enter a career already prepared to succeed in it. At High School for Recording Arts, where 92% of students experience poverty, and 40% have experienced homelessness, the same principle produced a 90% graduation rate and an 82% reduction in criminal justice contact among graduates. At Gibson Ek, students who found their own internships after navigating real rejection developed agency alongside professional skills in ways that pre-arranged placements could not have produced.

Educators and school leaders build these learning experiences and environments, but the applied learning enabling conditions are what determine whether their work can be sustained and scaled across a state. Metrics for participation and completion signal that applied learning is valued and make inequities in access visible. Dedicated funding treats work-based learning and youth apprenticeships as infrastructure rather than enrichment, which is the prerequisite for sustainable programming rather than one-off pilots. Equity-focused supports for underserved students, including transportation assistance, stipends, and family engagement, are what allow the students who benefit most from applied learning to actually access it. Employer incentives expand the number of partners willing to host and invest in students. And funding for concurrent enrollment teacher credentialing expands the supply of college-level coursework available in high school settings. No single condition creates the learning environments the RPC documents; it is their combination that makes high-quality applied learning accessible, equitable, and durable.

4. Competency-Based Education

The RPC documents in considerable detail what happens when schools make skills visible, trackable, and central to how students experience learning rather than treating them as background goals. At Gibson Ek High School, a twenty-competency dashboard tracked student growth in real time across internships, design labs, and independent projects, with trees that digitally grew as evidence accumulated. Students could see exactly where they had developed and where they still needed to invest, which enabled a kind of self-directed development that is nearly impossible when skills remain implicit. The result was not just growth in academic, durable, and technical competencies, but also the development of what researchers call metacognition and agency: students who understood their own learning, knew how to seek out experiences that addressed gaps, and could advocate for their own growth using evidence. Gibson Ek graduates persisted in their chosen postsecondary paths at rates roughly 17 points above the national average, an outcome the school connects directly to students knowing themselves well enough to make wise choices.

These practices depend on a policy environment that allows and supports competency-based approaches. Flexible instructional time definitions allow learning to count when it happens in workplaces and community settings, not just in classrooms. The ability to award credit based on demonstrated mastery rather than seat time means that a student who develops communication skills through a sustained professional internship can have that development recognized rather than ignored.

Clear state criteria for how mastery is determined and validated give schools and districts the scaffolding they need to implement CBE credibly, rather than each school inventing its own standards from scratch. And published guidance, exemplar models, and technical assistance reduce the implementation burden enough that schools without large research and development capacity can actually build these systems. The educators at Gibson Ek built these models through years of design, iteration, and deep commitment to their students. The CBE enabling conditions are what determine whether the lessons of their work are available to more than a handful of well-resourced innovators.

5. Graduation Requirements

The RPC found that the schools developing durable skills most effectively had built those skills into what students were actually required to do and demonstrate, not just into what schools aspired to provide. STEM School Chattanooga organized its entire graduation logic around three core tenets: Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Innovation, so that advancement required demonstrated growth across increasingly complex experiences over four years. Batesville High School operated in a policy environment where work-based learning counted toward credit, which enabled 100% of graduates to earn at least some college credit and 40 students to complete full Associate's Degrees before graduation. At Building 21 Philadelphia and Gibson Ek, portfolio- and exhibition-based demonstrations of academic, durable, and technical competency produced more sophisticated metacognitive awareness in students than standardized testing could have, because the evidence-gathering process itself required students to understand and articulate their own development across both skill domains.

Graduation requirements are the policy lever that determines whether portrait-level ambition translates into actual instructional priority. When states offer multiple diploma pathways, they create legitimate routes to success for students pursuing different futures. When they allow alternatives to standardized tests, including capstones, portfolios, and exhibitions, they create space for the kinds of authentic demonstration the RPC documents as most effective. When they require students to demonstrate durable skills as a condition of graduation rather than an optional add-on, they give schools a reason to invest in developing those skills intentionally. And when they allow work-based learning and youth apprenticeships to count toward graduation credit, they directly enable the kind of applied, real-world learning the RPC shows produces the deepest and most lasting skill development. These conditions, together, are what translate a portrait vision into a genuine graduation expectation.

6. Accountability Systems

The RPC documents outcomes that most state accountability systems are simply not designed to see. High School for Recording Arts, serving students that traditional schools had largely failed, achieved a 90% graduation rate, 100% college acceptance for FAFSA completers, 100% employment for graduates choosing career entry, and an 82% reduction in criminal justice contact among alumni. STEM School Chattanooga maintained a 95 to 97% graduation rate with more than twice as many applicants as seats, a clear signal of community confidence in the school's approach. One Stone and Gibson Ek graduates persisted in postsecondary pathways at rates well above national averages. These outcomes emerged directly from the three core practices the RPC identifies: making skills visible and trackable, creating authentic experiences with real stakes, and integrating skill development into all learning rather than treating it as an add-on. But narrow accountability metrics focused on test scores and basic graduation data would never surface these practices as worth replicating, and might even penalize the schools for deviating from conventional instructional approaches.

The accountability enabling conditions are what determine whether strong portrait implementation is recognized, incentivized, and spread rather than tolerated or overlooked. Including a college and career readiness metric in the accountability formula signals that readiness beyond academic achievement is a shared priority. Incorporating both participation and completion of applied learning into that metric ensures schools are accountable not just for offering pathways, but for supporting students to succeed in them as well, which is a meaningful distinction when access without support produces inequitable outcomes. And allowing locally-developed indicators in the accountability system creates a mechanism for districts that have built strong portrait-aligned learning models to demonstrate impact in ways that reflect their communities' values and goals, rather than being evaluated entirely

on metrics that were not designed with their students in mind. Accountability is ultimately what determines whether the other enabling conditions are taken seriously. These three conditions, working together, are what make it possible for the practices that the RPC documents to be recognized and rewarded at scale. They are the final piece of the infrastructure of possibility this report describes: the mechanism by which states signal that the work educators and communities are already doing to develop more than just academic skills in their students is permitted, valued, measured, and built to last.

Recommendations

The enabling conditions documented in this scan represent the building blocks of an infrastructure of possibility, one that allows portrait-aligned learning to move from isolated innovation to systemic practice.

States are not starting from the same place, and the path forward looks different depending on how much of that infrastructure already exists. The recommendations below are organized around three stages of development, followed by guidance for the educators and district leaders doing this work in any state context.

Stage 1: Establish the Foundation
States that are early in their enabling conditions journey should focus on establishing the foundational elements that give the rest of the system something to build from.

Key priorities include:

- **Developing a Statewide Portrait or Graduate Profile:** Created through meaningful community engagement, this provides a shared vision that aligns the work of educators, employers, and families around a common set of goals.
- **Requiring Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAPs):** These plans create a structure for connecting coursework and applied learning opportunities to postsecondary aspirations.
- **Investing in durable skills standards or competency progressions:** Clear standards give districts the instructional guidance they need to move portrait-level language into classroom practice.

States at this stage can also leverage work already done in other states. While no model transfers perfectly across contexts, drawing inspiration from the comprehensive portrait implementation resources developed by states like North Carolina reduces the burden on DOE capacity and funding to start from scratch.

These foundational conditions do not require a sweeping legislative overhaul. They require leadership, coordination, and a clear articulation of what students should know and be able to do upon graduation.

Stage 2: Build Coherence and Capacity
States that have enacted several enabling conditions should focus on building coherence across categories and creating the collaborative structures that support implementation at scale.

Key priorities include:

- **Align graduation requirements with portrait competencies:** A portrait vision without aligned graduation requirements sends mixed signals and leads to uneven implementation.
- **Publish clear guidance on how mastery is defined and measured:** Mastery-based credit policies without clear guidance for determining mastery leave districts to figure it out on their own.
- **Ensure policies across categories work together rather than in isolation:** The strongest states are not necessarily those with the most conditions in place, but those whose conditions reinforce one another across categories.

States should also consider investing in collaborative implementation networks. Models such as Idaho's Mastery Education Network or Washington's Mastery-Based Learning Work Group, which supported the implementation of personalized and mastery-based education models, bring together districts, schools, and employers to learn from each other and build shared capacity. These structures reduce the burden on individual districts and accelerate the spread of effective practice across a state.

Stage 3: Advance the Next Generation of Policy
States with comprehensive enabling conditions in place should look beyond foundational conditions toward next generation policy levers.

Key priorities include:

- **Innovative assessments:** Investing in validated tools that measure competencies alongside academic knowledge. Many states certify experiences as demonstrations of durable skills but leave assessment design to the local level. State-level investment provides stronger, more consistent foundations.
- **Statewide articulation agreements:** Ensuring the transferability of early college credits to a state's public colleges so that dual or concurrent enrollment coursework translates into real acceleration rather than lost credit.
- **Professional development incentives:** Encouraging durable skills instruction as part of licensure renewal, so educators have the technical expertise to translate portrait language into actionable teaching plans.
- **Cross-agency coordination requirements:** Aligning departments of education and labor, since applied learning experiences live at the intersection of these systems.
- **Funding and technical assistance for local portrait development:** Supporting districts in creating local portraits that complement statewide visions and reflect community-specific needs and aspirations.

What Educators and District Leaders Can Do Now

This report recognizes that the infrastructure of possibility does not begin at the state level. It begins in classrooms and communities.

One of the more significant findings of this scan is that all 50 states have instructional time definitions flexible enough for applied learning opportunities to count toward required hours. Superintendents and local education leaders already have this lever available. Using it deliberately to expand access to work-based learning, youth apprenticeships, and other applied experiences is one of the most immediate actions possible.

Beyond structural flexibility, educators can build conditions for durable skills development without any authorization.

The schools highlighted in the Critically Enabled Practices section demonstrate what is possible by:

- Making skills visible and trackable
- Creating authentic experiences with real stakes
- Integrating skill development across learning rather than treating it as an add-on

Educators can:

- Intentionally name and discuss durable skills alongside academic content
- Bring employers and community leaders into the classroom to connect skills to real industries
- Use project-based learning that requires collaboration, communication, and problem solving in complex, real-world contexts

These practices do not replace the need for state-level enabling conditions. But they are where the work is ignited. And in many communities, they are already thriving.

Conclusion

This research project surfaced many important findings about how states are working to bring their portrait visions to life inside and outside the classroom. But perhaps the most substantial one is that the infrastructure of possibility supporting learners to develop the academic, durable, and technical skills crucial to success beyond high school is present in some form in every state. The enabling conditions we studied are not the bricks that create a building; they are the mortar that strengthens the structure and allows it to grow higher.

The bricks are already being laid. Educators are designing learning experiences that make durable skills visible and central to how students experience school. Employers are opening their doors to young people and investing in the next generation of talent. Communities are coming together to articulate what their graduates should know and be able to do. These efforts do not depend on state policy to begin. But as this scan demonstrates, they depend on state policy to reach every student, to endure beyond the tenure of a single champion, and to function as a coherent system rather than a collection of isolated innovations.

The states highlighted in this report show what becomes possible when that mortar is in place: when graduation requirements, accountability systems, funding streams, and competency-based learning put the portraits being created into practice. The recommendations point toward what comes next for states at every stage of the journey. And the practices documented through the Research Practice Collaborative remind us that at the center of all of this infrastructure are students, developing the skills and confidence to navigate a future that will demand both technical expertise and the ability to communicate, collaborate, adapt, and lead. Building this infrastructure is not optional. It is how we ensure that the promise of the portrait movement becomes the experience of every learner.

Methodology

This report is based on a 50-state policy scan conducted between late 2025 and early 2026 by Aidan Schief, Policy and Research Associate at America Succeeds, and Ellie Taylor, Independent Analyst. The scan examined state-level policies across six categories of enabling conditions: Portrait Vision, College and Career Readiness, Applied Learning Opportunities, Graduation Requirements, Competency-Based Education, and Accountability Systems. Within each category, the scan posed a consistent set of research questions designed to determine whether specific enabling conditions were present in state law, regulation, or policy guidance.

For each state, we consulted four primary types of sources. State statutes and administrative codes provided the legal foundation, establishing what states require, permit, or fund. State education department websites and guidance documents offered insight into how agencies interpret and implement those laws, including program frameworks, technical assistance resources, and publicly available policy guidance. Legislative session records and bill texts helped identify recently enacted or pending legislation that may not yet be reflected in codified law. Finally, secondary research from organizations including KnowledgeWorks and the Education Commission of the States, and other policy and research institutions, provided national context and cross-state comparisons that informed our analysis.

The enabling conditions framework itself was refined iteratively over the course of the scan. As we encountered the full range of state policy approaches, we sharpened the specificity of certain research questions and clarified the boundaries of others to ensure that the framework captured meaningful policy variation rather than superficial differences. This iterative process strengthened the final framework by grounding it in the actual policy landscape rather than in assumptions about what states might have in place.

It is worth noting what this scan does and does not capture. This scan documents state-level policy and educational leadership as reflected in publicly available legal, regulatory, and guidance materials. The public availability of the policies and guidance we documented is key in this scan. There are undoubtedly present conditions that we missed based on the elusivity of answers to our questions. This scan does not assess implementation quality, district-level variation in practice, or student outcomes (beyond publicly available data captured in two of the enabling conditions). A state that has enacted strong enabling conditions may still struggle with implementation, and a state that lacks formal policy infrastructure may have districts doing extraordinary portrait-aligned work on their own initiative. This scan is intended to map the state-level terrain, not to evaluate the quality of practice on the ground.

Appendix A

The criteria for selecting enabling conditions are articulated below:

1. Directly supports the development of students' durable skills.
2. Directly supports a student's ability to access and thrive in postsecondary education or workforce settings.
3. Creates a function in education systems that supports the achievement of either of the two criteria above.

Condition Category	Enabling Condition	Criteria # Satisfied	Rationale
Portrait Vision	Does the state espouse a vision for the durable skills that high school students should have upon graduation?	3	When a state articulates a clear vision for the durable skills students should have upon graduation, it establishes shared expectations for what teaching and learning should prioritize. This vision anchors curriculum, instruction, and assessment around competencies and expectations that sit at the heart of a PoG. While not instructional on its own, it creates coherence across policies and initiatives. A clear skills vision is a necessary foundation for consistent PoG-aligned implementation. While it is good practice for schools, districts, or LEAs to create their own skills visions, a state doing so is a powerful tool to align leadership around the systems change necessary to bring the vision to life in the classroom for all students.
Portrait Vision	Is their skills vision in Portrait of a Graduate form? If so, how did they engage local community stakeholders in the creation of the PoG and supporting resources?	3	A PoG developed with meaningful community, educator, and employer engagement reflects shared values and real-world expectations for student readiness. This process builds legitimacy and buy-in, increasing the likelihood that PoG competencies influence classroom practice and student experiences.
Portrait Vision	If the state does not have a statewide PoG, do they provide specific guidance for districts to create their own?	3	Providing guidance for locally developed PoGs empowers districts to contextualize readiness expectations within their communities while maintaining alignment with state priorities. Guidance helps districts avoid starting from scratch and promotes quality and consistency in local PoGs.
CCR	Does the state collect and report metrics related to high school graduates' post-secondary outcomes (e.g., college enrollment and matriculation, certification completion, career entry)?	2,3	By collecting and reporting postsecondary outcomes, states create feedback loops that reveal whether graduates are successfully transitioning into college, credentials, or careers. These data help systems align high school experiences with real-world expectations embedded in a Portrait of a Graduate. When reported at a district and school level, these metrics can also help families make school choice decisions. While not instructional on their own, outcome metrics inform accountability and focus improvement efforts on student readiness beyond graduation. This transparency enables education leaders to refine pathways that truly prepare students for life after high school.

Condition Category	Enabling Condition	Criteria # Satisfied	Rationale
CCR	Has the state created and published grade-level or grade-banded standards or competency progressions for durable skills or the specific skills in their PoG?	3	Grade-banded or leveled progressions for the skills on a portrait create a shared language and set of expectations that guide school leaders, educators, and students in the development and articulation of durable skills throughout experiences and progression through grade levels.
CCR	Does the state require students to develop an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP), or a similar plan for learning in high school that helps students connect their secondary coursework with their postsecondary plans?	1, 2, 3	ICAPs help students connect their coursework, experiences, and skill development to postsecondary and career goals, reinforcing the relevance of PoG competencies. The process of creating an ICAP and periodically revising it is a direct practice in multiple durable skills such as metacognition, critical thinking, agency, and goal setting. At the system level, ICAPs align advising, course planning, and applied learning opportunities around a shared readiness vision. This ensures PoG visions are not abstract ideals and can be integrated into personalized roadmaps.
ALOs	Which metrics (e.g., participation, completion, outcomes) does the state collect and report related to applied learning opportunities (WBL, youth apprenticeships, dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, credential programs)?	3	Tracking participation and completion in applied learning ensures states value experiences where durable skills are developed through real-world application. These metrics signal that learning beyond the classroom is central to student success and PoG attainment. By measuring outcomes, states encourage quality and equity in access to applied learning. Moreover, reporting outcomes supports students and families in making informed decisions about which applied learning opportunities the student should engage in.
ALOs	Does the state provide dedicated funding for applied learning opportunities?	1, 2 ,3	Dedicated state funding enables schools to offer high-quality applied learning experiences where students develop durable skills through real-world practice. While federal and philanthropic funding are important for driving innovation and piloting new models, they can be unevenly distributed and rely on factors outside of a state's control. State-created funding streams signal long-term commitment, support sustainable staffing and infrastructure, and ensure applied learning is treated as a core component of the education system rather than an optional add-on. This stability is essential for scaling PoG–aligned experiences equitably across schools and districts.
ALOs	What financial, transportation, or family engagement support does the state provide to underserved or low-income students to access applied learning opportunities?	1, 2, 3	These supports remove barriers that often prevent underserved students from accessing applied learning opportunities. By addressing financial burdens, logistics, and family engagement, states ensure PoG-aligned experiences are more equitably available. This enables students, who, without these supports, may be excluded from applied learning opportunities, to build durable skills and access career pathways.

Condition Category	Enabling Condition	Criteria # Satisfied	Rationale
ALOs	Does the state provide funding for concurrent enrollment teachers' training and/or credentialing?	3	As a growing number of students seek to complete college coursework while in high school, it is critical to meet that demand with a greater supply of educators who are credentialed to teach those classes. Supporting teacher credentialing expands access to college-level coursework while students are still in high school. This strengthens academic readiness, confidence for postsecondary success, and reduces financial barriers to persisting once enrolled in college. This condition helps operationalize PoG goals related to students' preparedness to succeed in postsecondary education.
ALOs	How does the state provide incentives for employer involvement in youth apprenticeship and WBL programs?	1, 2, 3	Employer incentives, such as tax credits and direct financial support for training costs, expand opportunities for students to develop durable and technical skills in authentic workplace settings by increasing employer engagement in work-based learning and youth apprenticeship recruitment. Partnerships between education systems and employers ground PoG competencies in real labor market expectations and support students to experience the workplace before they are expected to gain employment that leads to economic mobility. For some students, WBL and apprenticeships in high school lead directly to employment after graduation. This alignment between education and employers is critical to translating PoGs into meaningful, applied experiences.
CBE	Does the state have a definition for instructional time that provides flexibility for work-based learning, youth apprenticeships, or credential programs within CTE pathways to count towards instructional time?	1, 2,3	Flexible instructional time enables learning to occur in workplaces and community settings aligned with PoG goals. It supports skill development through authentic experiences rather than limiting skill development by forcing students and schools to follow rigid schedules that do not recognize learning outside the classroom. At a system level, it removes barriers to applied learning program expansion and innovation. This flexibility is essential for moving past the Carnegie Unit era and promoting applied, skills-based learning.
CBE	Does the state allow for credit to be awarded based on mastery of content rather than seat time? If so, is this flexibility broad or conditional (tied to pilots, grants, specific grade levels or courses)?	3	Allowing for competency-, mastery-, or proficiency-based credit ensures students progress by demonstrating learning, not time spent in a seat. This aligns with PoG emphasis on competencies and transferable skills. It encourages personalized pacing and deeper learning. At scale, it supports a systems shift toward outcomes-based accountability.

Condition Category	Enabling Condition	Criteria # Satisfied	Rationale
CBE	Does the state define criteria or provide guidance for how mastery is determined and validated (e.g., assessments, rubrics, portfolios)?	3	States providing clear criteria for mastery determinations ensures consistency and credibility in skills-based learning. Rubrics, portfolios, guidelines, and assessments make durable skills visible and measurable. This guidance supports educators in implementing PoG-aligned instruction and strengthens trust in alternative learning demonstrations and assessments.
CBE	Does the state support implementation of competency-based education through published guidance, exemplar models, or technical assistance for schools and districts?	3	Guidance, exemplars, and technical assistance help districts translate PoG-aligned CBE into practice. This support reduces implementation burden and variability. State support is critical for scaling PoG-aligned learning models because it builds educator capacity to design instruction around skills and competency.
Graduation Requirements	Does the state outline or articulate distinctions between diploma pathways that reflect different coursework, specialization, or career vs college pathways?	2, 3	Multiple diploma pathways allow for recognition of diverse student goals and routes to success, consistent with PoG visions of readiness. They incentivize students to pursue academic, technical, or hybrid pathways aligned to their strengths that differentiate themselves from students who do not. Systemically, they legitimize varied forms of skills development and postsecondary preparation. This flexibility helps graduation requirements reflect PoG competencies and real student aspirations.
Graduation Requirements	Does the state offer multiple ways for students to demonstrate CCR, including options beyond standardized tests that allow for student choice, such as completion of ALOs, capstones, portfolios, or exhibitions of learning?	1, 3	Allowing ALOs, capstones, portfolios, and exhibitions of learning as legitimate demonstrations of college and career readiness elevates students' ability to show evidence of learning beyond traditional academic knowledge. These approaches align directly with PoG competencies like communication, critical thinking, and leadership. They also empower local innovation while aligning to statewide expectations. This condition ensures PoG competencies can be demonstrated and evidenced through authentic performance.
Graduation Requirements	Does the state require all students to demonstrate acquisition of durable skills as a part of meeting graduation requirements, and how are these demonstrations validated or supported?	1	Requiring students to demonstrate durable skills to graduate directly embeds PoG competencies into the core definition of readiness. It ensures that durable skills are taught and assessed intentionally. Validation mechanisms, such as project-based, service-based, and work-based learning provide credibility to skills competency claims. This condition transforms PoGs into a lived requirement rather than a symbolic vision statement.

Condition Category	Enabling Condition	Criteria # Satisfied	Rationale
Graduation Requirements	Does the state allow for WBL and youth apprenticeships to count towards graduation requirements? If so, do they count for course credit, advanced graduation pathways, or both?	1, 2, 3	Allowing WBL and apprenticeships to count for credit affirms applied learning outside the classroom as essential to readiness. This integration reduces trade-offs between acquiring academic credit and career preparation by allowing students to gain durable skills while progressing toward graduation. It directly embeds PoG-aligned learning into core requirements.
Accountability Systems	Does the state include a CCR metric or indicator in its accountability formula?	2, 3	In lieu of scanning for states that have a definition of CCR, we determined it is much more impactful for states to go beyond definitions and include CCR metrics in accountability systems. Including CCR metrics signals that readiness outcomes matter alongside academic achievement. It supports the alignment of accountability with PoG goals focused on life after high school.
Accountability Systems	Within the CCR indicator, does the state include measures that reflect both participation and completion of applied learning opportunities?	1, 2,3	Incorporating measurements of both participation and completion of applied learning opportunities into CCR metrics ensures schools are incentivized to help students not only access but succeed in applied learning opportunities. Additionally, this acts as a proxy for accountability measurements related to students' development of durable skills. Data-driven accountability for applied learning strengthens pathway effectiveness and promotes quality experiences.
Accountability Systems	Does the state allow for locally-developed indicators in its accountability system?	3	Allowing locally-developed indicators to impact school accountability ratings enables districts to reflect community priorities and unique PoG visions in their learning model. This flexibility supports innovation in readiness demonstrations while maintaining statewide coherence. Locally contextualized accountability measures strengthen educator buy-in and support implementation of PoG visions that are adaptive to local contexts rather than uniformly prescribed.

Appendix B

ALO: Applied Learning Opportunity, which we define as Dual/Concurrent Enrollment, Work-Based Learning/ Youth Apprenticeship, and Industry-Recognized Credential attainment opportunities.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) / Mastery-Based Education / Proficiency-Based Education: These terms describe the same general approach to teaching, learning, and crediting, in which students progress and earn credit by demonstrating that they have learned the material rather than by completing a set number of instructional hours. States use different terminology: Idaho uses "mastery-based education," Oregon and Vermont use "proficiency-based," and the broader policy literature most commonly uses "competency-based education." This report uses CBE as the default term and category label, but references individual states using their preferred terminology. Regardless of the term, the core principle is the same: what a student knows and can do matters more than how long they spent learning it.

CCR: College and Career Readiness.

Dual Enrollment / Concurrent Enrollment: Both terms describe arrangements in which high school students take college-level courses and earn postsecondary credit while still enrolled in high school. However, "dual enrollment" describes courses taught on a college campus and "concurrent enrollment" describes college courses taught at the high school by a credentialed high school teacher. Some states also use the terms "early college" or "dual credit" to describe concurrent enrollment.

Durable Skills: In an era when technical skills are evolving at an unprecedented pace, there is an important set of durable 'soft skills' that last throughout an entire career. This includes a combination of how we use what we know – critical thinking, communication, collaboration – and how we show up in the world – leadership, resilience, self-awareness.

Enabling Condition: State policies or published guidance that enable learners to develop durable skills and meaningfully prepare themselves for life after high school. Each enabling condition was determined as present or not present based on the evidence available in these sources. However, state education policy rarely lends itself to simple binary answers. A state may permit a practice without actively supporting it, or may fund a program through annual appropriations rather than permanent statute. To capture this kind of nuance, each determination was accompanied by an explanatory note documenting the specific policy mechanism, its scope, and any important qualifications. These notes allow readers to understand whether a condition exists in a given state, as well as what form it takes and how durable it is likely to be. Additionally, we used the answer format of "Yes, but…" or "No, but…" prior to explanatory notes where significant nuance in the answers were present.

ICAP: Individual Career and Academic Plan, which is a plan developed by a learner, often in middle school or at the beginning of 9th grade that helps the learner connect their coursework, experiences, and skill development to postsecondary and career goals.

IRC: Industry-Recognized Credential, which is a certification, license, or other formal credential issued by or aligned to the standards of an industry or professional organization that validates a student's technical skills in a specific field. Examples include certifications in areas such as emergency medical services, information technology, welding, and certified nursing assistance. IRCs are distinct from academic diplomas or degrees in that they signal readiness for specific occupational roles and are recognized by employers as evidence of job-relevant competency.

"PoG" or "Portrait": Portrait (or Profile) of a Graduate: Portraits often include six to eight competencies, such as academic content knowledge, global citizenship, critical thinking, effective communication, adaptability, collaboration, and growth mindset, though the exact contents vary by state. A central component of developing a portrait is engaging community stakeholders, including parents, educators, employers, and community leaders, in crafting the vision statement. This process distinguishes portrait efforts from other state-led education reforms by

prioritizing community voice in the alignment of learner outcomes with the context and needs of specific places, industries, and populations. While this element is most relevant at the local level, where districts are creating their own portraits, states creating them have a greater capacity to lead large-scale community stakeholder engagement efforts that synthesize a diverse set of perspectives on educational goals into a single framework. This convening power is a crucial tool for garnering buy-in around a vision-setting framework that is meant to become an essential ingredient in reforms to learners' experiences, measurements of achievement, and schools' accountability determinations.

Seat Time / Carnegie Unit: The traditional method of measuring student progress and awarding credit based on the number of hours a student spends in a classroom rather than on what they have learned. The Carnegie Unit, established in 1906, defined one unit of credit as 120 hours of contact time with an instructor. Most state credit systems are still built on this foundation. Competency-based education policies represent a departure from this model by allowing students to earn credit through demonstrated mastery regardless of the number of hours spent in instruction.

WBL: Work-Based Learning is a learning experience that takes place in a professional workplace or community setting, in which students apply academic and durable skills in authentic contexts under the guidance of both an educator and an employer or site supervisor. Examples include internships, youth apprenticeships, cooperative education placements, clinical rotations, and supervised career exploration experiences.

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