



SCALING HIGH-QUALITY CAREER PATHWAYS

Invest Forward Convening: July 2022 Session Recap



ABOUT THE CONVENING

In **July 2022**, Invest Forward held a convening in Nashville, Tennessee, bringing together **leaders from 25 districts** to share ideas, learn from one another, and prioritize stimulus funding to support postsecondary pathway programs in their schools.

Research has shown that high-quality postsecondary education and training is the ticket to **long-term opportunity**. But since the pandemic began, we have seen declines in high school graduation rates, drops in direct college enrollment, a youth unemployment rate that peaked higher than it has in decades, and an education system that is still struggling to find a new “normal.”

Many schools have done tremendous work and invested heavily in strengthening and expanding their efforts to support students’ ability to obtain the training and credentials necessary to be successful beyond high school. **Invest Forward** is committed to recognizing and sharing those efforts widely, to build momentum and support for this important work.

WHAT IS A “HIGH-QUALITY” CAREER PATHWAY?

K-12 education, postsecondary education or training, and the workforce are not three separate systems; **when leaders view this pathway as an interconnected progression** rather than three discrete systems, they can create more comprehensive and coherent policies that expand economic opportunity and mobility for students by offering them an intentionally connected continuum organized around demand-driven pathways to family-sustaining careers.

Pathways are sequences of courses and experiences that begin in high school and lead to a postsecondary credential with labor market value. Pursuing a pathway, as the name implies, means that **students’ educational experiences are progressive journeys** that offer them the opportunities to gain knowledge, explore interests, build skills, get on-the-job experience, and create networks—all in pursuit of the ultimate goal of landing in a career that will enable them to live prosperous and fulfilling lives.

HOW DO WE SCALE HIGH-QUALITY CAREER PATHWAYS?

All **high-quality career pathways** have an intentional connection between the following components:

- Prioritizing equitable opportunities and outcomes
- Availing students of opportunities for meaningful career exploration early and often
- Building alignment between academic instruction and the demands of the labor market
- Integrating work-based learning opportunities
- Providing a rigorous series of courses
- Supporting dual enrollment and other early postsecondary opportunities
- Encouraging network building and social capital development
- Creating opportunities to earn credentials
- Implementing robust advising structures



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Scaling High-Quality Career Pathways - Slide Deck](#)
- [DCPS Student Guide to Graduation, College, and Career](#)



EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL HIGH-QUALITY CAREER PATHWAY PROGRAM

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF DISTRICTS SCALING HIGH-QUALITY CAREER PATHWAYS

- [Cherry Creek Innovation Campus \(Colorado\) Labor market Information \(LMI\) Aligned Pathways](#)
- [Academies of Nashville \(Metro Nashville Public Schools\) Pathways Requirement](#)
- [Sunset P-Tech Grow Your Own \(Dallas ISD\) Early Postsecondary](#)
- [Boston MyCAP Robust Advising](#)
- [CareerWise DC Work-Based Learning](#)



DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Presenter: **Samantha Havilland**, Executive Director College and Career Success, Denver Public Schools

Denver Public Schools updated their graduation requirements for students graduating in 2021, requiring all students to graduate having a plan for after high school that is meaningful to them. Students work with their counselors, teachers, and families to develop, update and complete their **personalized Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAPs)**, a process which starts as early as the sixth grade. This systematic, guided progression of lessons and supports empowers students to learn about themselves and evaluate their path to career and college, including setting and marking progress towards goals, exploring career and college options, planning towards high school graduation, and learning about financial literacy and financial aid opportunities.

Using ESSER funding, DPS was able to:

- **Expand summer learning** for elementary students, including a dedicated hour of “genius time” that encourages students to explore STEM-related enrichment and build foundational “work-based learning” skills
- **Expand summer programs focused on STEAM** coursework for middle school students, including engineering, environmental engineering, social justice, math, science
- **Provide a personalized inventory form** for all high school students, twice a year, accessible through both student and parent portals, to encourage greater family engagement with their students’ progress toward ICAP goals
- **Pilot a program** to have ICAP follow students to postsecondary; DPS staff shares information from both the ICAP and Senior exit survey with the colleges that students intend to enroll, in an effort to create a more seamless transition into postsecondary.