

Education-to- Workforce Learner Pathways:

How Intermediary Organizations Can
Support and Help Sustain Effective
Partnerships

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly every sector of society has been upended by the Covid-19 pandemic. In K–12 education, leaders are working to help children catch up on the lessons they missed and accelerate their learning. Despite the difficult circumstances, educators remain committed to ensuring all young people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to go to college and succeed in a career. Amid the disruptions and economic uncertainty, there is renewed interest in maximizing collaboration with local and regional intermediary organizations that connect K–12 schools; institutions of higher education; employers; workforce development agencies; and other partners. Intermediaries can play an important role in driving long-term student success, particularly through the promotion of education-to-workforce learner pathways.

Members of Chiefs for Change, a bipartisan network of state and district education leaders, are leveraging intermediaries to expand career and technical education (CTE) opportunities for students and respond to the challenges of the moment.

In this brief, Chiefs for Change explains what characterizes an effective intermediary and how both state and local intermediaries can respond to community needs, provide critical support, and build sustainable education-to-workforce learner pathways. The brief also describes how education systems in the state of Tennessee; New Orleans, Louisiana; and San Antonio, Texas are working with intermediaries in their jurisdictions. In addition, the brief offers the following recommendations for policymakers and education leaders.

- 1. Champion policies that promote intermediary organizations.** Conduct a scan of relevant policies to determine which, if any, discourage the role and use of intermediary organizations. This can help to inform and drive state and local education priorities and initiatives. The scan should also take into consideration any policies that are missing but should be present.
- 2. Develop protocols for engaging intermediary organizations.** To ensure partnerships are established in an appropriate manner and for specific purposes, formalize guidance that transparently defines roles and responsibilities, as well as desired outcomes of the partnerships. Program guidance should be developed in concert with other agency and community partners.



- 3. Incentivize intermediary organizations to become involved.** Pursue various means of incentivizing the inclusion of intermediary organizations in state and local learner pathway initiatives. Identify federal and state funding opportunities across partner agencies that can be braided to maximize engagement and achieve desired outcomes. Identified opportunities should take into account not only current federal responses to pandemic recovery (e.g., the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund), but also existing federal acts that support education-to-workforce learner pathways and experiences (e.g., Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act).
- 4. Remove barriers inhibiting intermediary organizations from expanding education-to-workforce opportunities for students.** Work with agency and community partners, as well as intermediary organizations, to identify existing implementation challenges at the state and local levels. Consider challenges that limit

engagement of employers and community organizations in learner pathways and work-based learning opportunities.

- 5. Develop program-quality indicators for intermediary organizations tied to state reporting metrics.** Contractual partnerships with intermediary organizations should include specific program-quality indicators that reflect state K–12 student postsecondary and career readiness priorities and metrics. A formal partnership should also outline data collection and reporting methods that an intermediary will use to ensure data integrity and full alignment with state metrics.
- 6. Regularly engage with intermediary organizations.** Facilitate regular check-ins and information gathering sessions with intermediary organizations to determine their impact and identify any policy or program adjustments that are needed to better support intermediaries in achieving the agreed-upon goals. Allow for ongoing constructive feedback from all parties to support transparency and program integrity.



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ABOUT CHIEFS FOR CHANGE

Chiefs for Change is a bipartisan network of diverse state and district education chiefs dedicated to preparing all students for today’s world and tomorrow’s through deeply committed leadership. Chiefs for Change advocates for policies and practices that are making a difference today for students, and builds a pipeline of talented, diverse Future Chiefs ready to lead major school systems.

INTRODUCTION

Developing robust opportunities for students to explore postsecondary options and career pathways can be a complex endeavor. It involves effectively communicating with multiple stakeholders such as K–12 schools; colleges and universities; employers; parents and students; and workforce development agencies. Challenges include ensuring that programs are high quality and aligned with state and local priorities; onboarding educators and employers on their roles and responsibilities; ensuring students possess the knowledge and skills for placements and are able to travel to off-campus job sites; ensuring appropriate liability and insurance coverages are in place; and more. Every aspect of the work requires a significant amount of capacity and a discrete knowledge of the various players. Intermediaries not only provide capacity and knowledge, they take ownership of the problem and translate among all the different systems involved to ensure there is equal trust and buy-in. When the right external partners are engaged, leaders are able to build experiences for students that add to the richness of their education and that set them up for long-term success.

An intermediary organization is one external partner that can help to catalyze and sustain relationships across relevant entities. With solid local partnerships and deep industry expertise, an intermediary supports the creation of learner pathways that allow students to explore their postsecondary options during their K–12 experience.

In our 2019 report [Let's Get to Work](#), Chiefs for Change highlights the critical role intermediary organizations can play in advancing high-quality CTE and progressive work-based learning opportunities. We point to the importance of intermediaries again in our [Blueprint for Postsecondary Success](#), noting that school districts should be full and highly engaged partners in states' efforts to address their changing workforce needs. The blueprint specifically calls on K–12 education leaders to seek “new forms of collaboration...to create new and better career pathways for all students.”

Working with external partners, primarily through intermediary organizations, to inform and drive state and local education-to-workforce priorities and initiatives is not a new concept, but it is of particular importance at this moment in time. As our nation recovers from the economic toll of Covid-19, and as students rethink their post-graduation plans, education leaders and policymakers must design a K–12 experience that is more responsive to students' needs. That includes ensuring students

are participating in meaningful learner pathways and are meeting specific state metrics intended to help them prepare for college and careers.

In response to the pandemic, the federal government provided an unprecedented amount of emergency relief aid for K–12 schools, and has given systems broad discretion on how to use it. States and districts must be good stewards of these funds while implementing sound approaches to accelerate learning. Supporting effective learner pathways is one approach that can pay dividends by providing new work-based learning opportunities, addressing the need for local talent, and promoting economic recovery and development.

This brief explains what an intermediary organization is and how it can help to create and sustain high-quality education-to-workforce learning experiences that benefit students and support states and communities in meeting their economic development goals. In addition, the report spotlights three intermediaries and their partnerships with systems led by members of Chiefs for Change.



INVESTING IN INTERMEDIARIES

Intermediary organizations can help develop, mobilize, translate, and advocate for various education-to-workforce learner pathway policies and initiatives at the local level. If conceived and planned appropriately, partnerships with intermediaries not only help to address what needs to occur, but provide a level of involvement that state and local agencies simply cannot offer due to logistics, capacity, and/or connections at the local level. As public demand increases for relevant, meaningful learner pathways aligned to workforce and community needs, the importance, and utilization, of intermediary organizations to help actualize these learning experiences will only increase.

What is an intermediary organization?

An intermediary exists between various entities as a means of efficiently and effectively connecting and delivering a range of services on behalf of one or more partners. The provisions are determined by the needs of the partner(s) and are affirmed through a formal working agreement. In K–12 education, an intermediary is often charged with working across multiple, diverse stakeholder groups, including education institutions (K–12 and postsecondary) and employers, to address and/or support education-to-workforce learner pathways and student work-based learning initiatives.

Roles and Functions of an Intermediary

When considering whether or not to use an intermediary, it is important to understand that most intermediary organizations can, and should, serve multiple roles when it comes to supporting a statewide or local K–12 initiative. Additionally, some organizations tapped to help address a specific initiative often already provide direct services to their communities beyond serving as an intermediary.

In general, an intermediary's roles and/or functions should be determined and clarified based on the desired goals and outcomes of the partnering agency. However, intermediary organizations typically take on one or more of the following responsibilities and/or functions in support of an initiative:

- Oversee a strategic plan—with key partners and local stakeholders—to achieve desired goals and outcomes.
- Develop, facilitate, and manage diverse stakeholders and groups needed to achieve desired goals and outcomes.
- Communicate and advocate for desired goals and outcomes across diverse stakeholders and groups to coalesce priorities around a common cause and/or need.
- Operationalize and manage identified program activities and deliverables needed to achieve desired goals and outcomes.
- Broker and leverage resources (human and/or fiscal) as needed to drive progress.
- Collect and report on program outputs and outcomes, including program quality, to ascertain progress toward desired goals and outcomes.

Within a given community or region, these functions can be performed by either an existing intermediary organization, a newly created entity, or a collaborative involving several organizations.



Types of Intermediaries

The type of organization and operational structure needed to serve in the capacity of an intermediary is often dependent on two key factors.

- The first is how the targeted initiative's goals and outcomes align with the mission of the intermediary organization.
- The second is whether the intermediary organization has the qualifications, experience, and capacity to actually achieve the targeted initiative's desired goals and outcomes.

This matchmaking process, though simple, is essential for determining the right type of intermediary organization and operational structure to support a K–12 initiative.

In Tennessee, Education Commissioner and Chiefs for Change member Penny Schwinn deploys this process as part of the Department of Education's Tennessee Pathways initiative. Tennessee Pathways is structured around three main components:¹

- K–12 college and career advisement.
- Early postsecondary and work-based learning opportunities for secondary students.
- Vertical alignment among K–12, postsecondary programs, and career opportunities.

To ensure the continued success of this statewide initiative, the department routinely seeks, and provides support to, local and regional organizations (such as Rutherford Works) that can serve as intermediaries with the purpose and capacity to create innovative partnerships reflective of the initiative's desired goals and outcomes.



Types of Intermediary Organizations

Employer or Workforce Facing

(e.g., chamber of commerce, workforce development board)

Faith or Community Based

Nonprofit

Postsecondary Institution

(i.e., a specific center or department)

Quasi-Governmental Entity

(i.e., adjunct organizations under the control of a department or agency; organizations independent of, but dependent upon, departments and agencies; or nonprofit organizations voluntarily affiliated with a department and agency)

1 Tennessee Pathways. Tennessee Department of Education. <https://www.tn.gov/education/pathwaystn.html>

USING INTERMEDIARIES TO BUILD LEARNER PATHWAYS

As noted, intermediaries can play a critical role in developing, mobilizing, translating, and advocating for various education-to-workforce learner pathway policies and initiatives at the local level. This last-mile support is often because intermediaries can provide logistical support and promote efficiency in ways that state and local agencies simply cannot. By deploying one or more intermediaries to support the build out and delivery of specific services and communications, an education leader not only expands their capacity to reach targeted individuals and groups, but has greater assurances that the overall process and messaging are effective.

For Chiefs for Change member and NOLA Public Schools Superintendent Henderson Lewis, Jr., the partnership with YouthForce NOLA in New Orleans gives students relevant work-based learning experiences with local employers in a structured setting. The experiences are designed to be fully aligned with district career-readiness priorities. A key objective of this partnership is to build schools' capacity so that "students graduate ready for postsecondary success, including not only college-ready academic skills, but also soft skills, technical skills, and work experience."²²



What is a learner pathway?

A pathway is a structured sequence of academic courses, technical training, and related work experiences that help learners develop the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the career of their choice.

What are the characteristics of high-quality learner pathways?

They:

- Begin in K–12 and continue in postsecondary education and employment.
- Align to high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations in states and regions.
- Allow learners to earn postsecondary credit and industry credentials while in high school.
- Include critical navigation supports for transition points between K–12 and postsecondary.
- Feature supports and policies to ensure equity within and across pathway opportunities.
- Support continued career advancement through additional credentialing and skill attainment.

Considerations

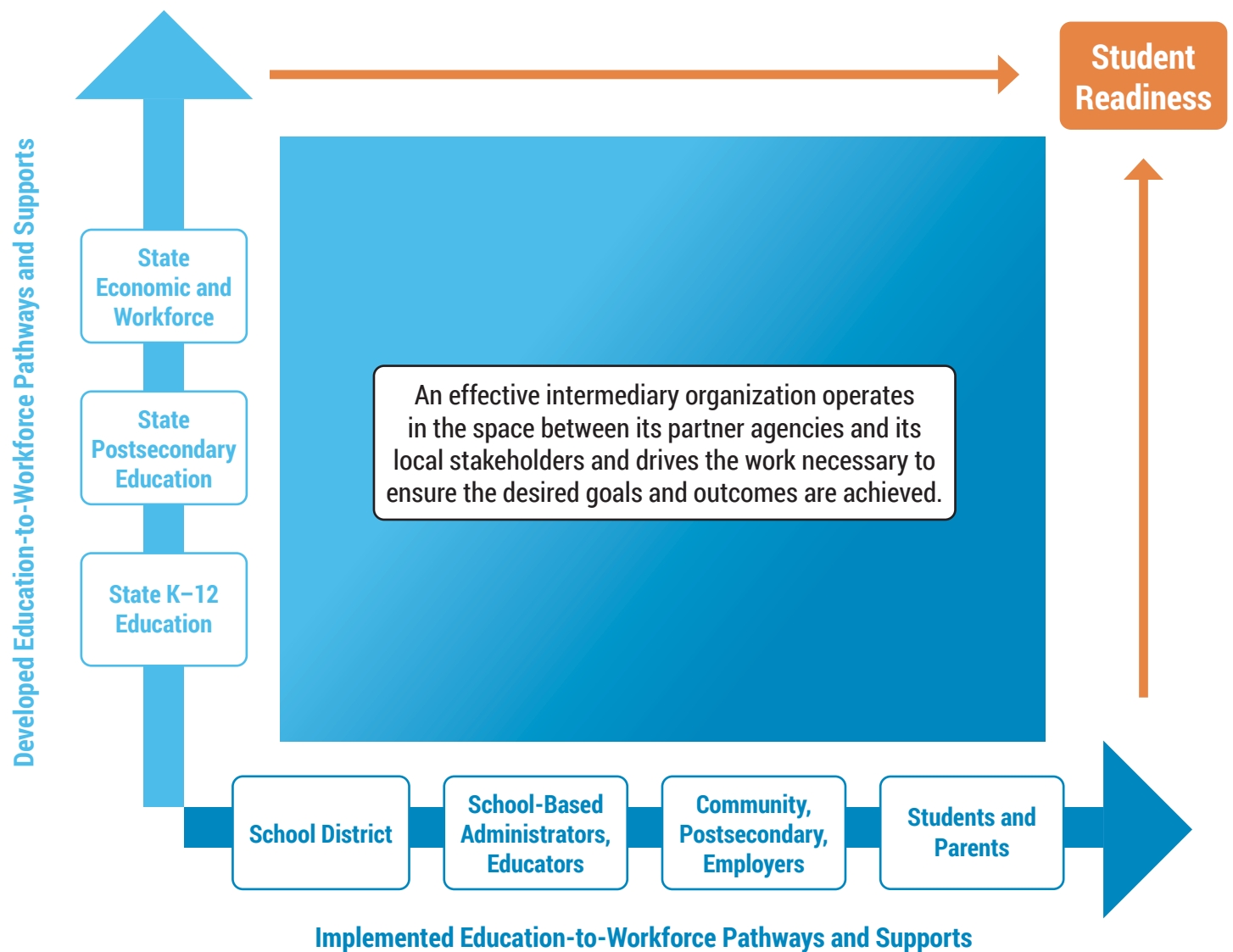
Along with the above general roles and functions of intermediaries, additional responsibilities should be identified by education leaders when building out and promoting state and local education-to-workforce learner pathways. These more targeted responsibilities are due to the complexities associated with the rollout of new/revised curriculum—including related policies, supportive programming, and professional development—as well as the extensive involvement of community stakeholders and employers.

When weighing such responsibilities, leaders should consider the capabilities of an organization prior to bringing it on as an intermediary.

These considerations should include the ability to:

- **Create a strategic plan** with a clear listing of actions and deliverables, responsible parties, and ongoing communications. The plan should serve as the intermediary’s roadmap to reach the initiative’s goals.
- **Develop stakeholder roles and responsibilities** not only for the intermediary, but for its cross-sector partner organizations. The documents should reflect the initiative’s goals as well as the reporting and communications structure the intermediary will use.
- **Develop stakeholder recruitment criteria** that articulate what types of partner organizations, as well as expertise, are needed by the intermediary to successfully achieve the initiative’s goals.
- **Develop stakeholder memorandums of agreement**, which state the responsibilities that both parties (intermediary and partner organization) commit to upholding.
- **Manage, disperse (if needed), and account for federal, state, and local funds** used to support logistics and the build out and delivery of specific services and communications.
- **Create stakeholder data dashboards** for partner organizations that reflect economic and labor data, post-secondary data, and K–12 student data associated with the learner pathways. The data profiles should be used to inform and support the work, as well as to gauge progress toward the initiative’s goals.
- **Identify and collect meaningful measures** (qualitative and quantitative) to evaluate and inform progress toward goals.

INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS AND HIGH-QUALITY K–12 LEARNER PATHWAYS AND SUPPORTS



INTERMEDIARIES AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

Work-based learning is an essential component of any high-quality education-to-workforce learner pathway. The approach is especially important in the current Covid environment, and there are calls and funding for more directed workforce experiences that will help spur economic recovery and build students' next-generation skills.

As with learner pathways, an intermediary can, and should, play a central role in developing and promoting relevant, robust work-based learning programs at the regional or local level. This includes involving employers in creating K–12 instructional content and providing opportunities for students to gain real-world experience that will help them to be college and career ready.

At the heart of the work is an intermediary's ability to establish meaningful partnerships with employers and associations from various industry sectors aligned to education-to-workforce learner pathways. An effective intermediary should be able to create, in collaboration with its agency and community partners, a work-based learning delivery model at scale that allows students to learn in both the classroom and in on-site work settings.

In Texas, the San Antonio Independent School District, formerly led by Chiefs for Change Board Chair Pedro Martinez, has partnered with San Antonio Works (SA Works) to help facilitate work-based learning internship placements and employment programs for district high school students. SA Works is an industry-led workforce development organization embedded in the San Antonio Economic Development Foundation, making it well posi-

tioned to partner with employers and the school district to identify and address the needs of all stakeholders.

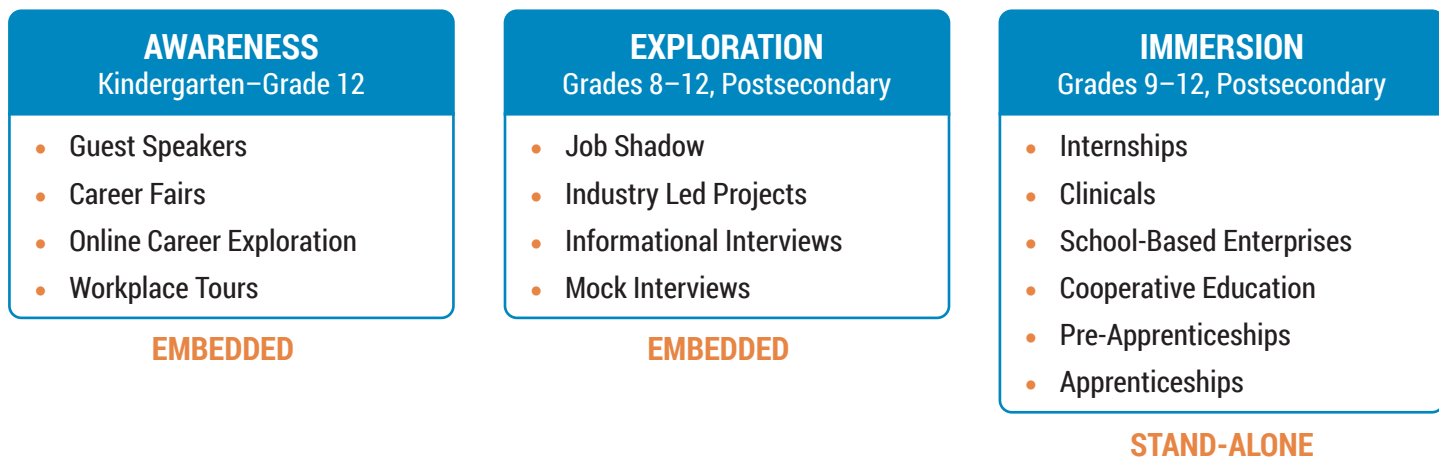
What is work-based learning?

Work-based learning is a model in which students have sustained interactions with industry or community professionals in real workplace settings, to the extent practicable, or simulated environments at an educational institution. These interactions foster in-depth, firsthand experience in performing tasks that are required in a given career field and that are aligned to curriculum and instruction.³

What is a work-based learning continuum?

A work-based learning continuum involves three types of experiences: career awareness, career exploration, and career immersion. Experiences are designed to increase in intensity over time as students move through the continuum. The continuum experiences are flexible, meaning different activities may overlap or occur multiple times throughout students' learning. Students may also begin at different ages or stages in their learning.

WORK-BASED LEARNING CONTINUUM



POLICY LIMITATIONS: INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

Even the most effective education leader and intermediary organization may face challenges in the build out and ongoing implementation of a work-based learning delivery structure and system.

For state education agencies, and to a lesser extent local school districts, the ability to address these challenges proactively will increase the likelihood that intermediaries can produce the results expected and give students relevant, robust work-based learning experiences that reflect their chosen pathways. The most common challenges fall into the following areas:

- **Age restrictions.** Federal law allows for exemptions for individuals under 18 years of age who are participating in a formal CTE or work-based learning program. States that do not provide similar exemptions in their statutes may greatly limit student access to quality, in-depth work-based learning experiences that are aligned with their pathways.
- **Liability insurance and workers' compensation.** It is important to establish clear policies on what qualifies as appropriate coverage for students participating in worksite work-based learning. These policies and a listing of general procedures can help ensure local school districts, employers, and families understand what is allowable and how coverage is provided or can be obtained if needed.
- **Travel time.** At the state and local levels, existing seat time, attendance reporting, and course scheduling policies can negatively impact student work-based learning participation, access, and quality of experience. By reviewing and addressing these policies so they take into account work-based learning program needs, more students can participate in meaningful placements aligned with their pathways.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS

To expand the use of intermediaries in developing high-quality learner pathways, Chiefs for Change makes the following recommendations for policymakers and education leaders.

- 1. Champion policies that promote intermediary organizations.** Conduct a scan of relevant policies to determine which, if any, discourage the role and use of intermediary organizations. This can help to inform and drive state and local education priorities and initiatives. The scan should also take into consideration any policies that are missing but should be present.
- 2. Develop protocols for engaging intermediary organizations.** To ensure partnerships are established in an appropriate manner and for specific purposes, formalize guidance that transparently defines roles and responsibilities, as well as desired outcomes of the partnerships. Program guidance should be developed in concert with other agency and community partners.
- 3. Incentivize intermediary organizations to become involved.** Pursue various means of incentivizing the inclusion of intermediary organizations in state and local learner pathway initiatives. Identify federal and state funding opportunities across partner agencies that can be braided to maximize engagement and achieve desired outcomes. Identified opportunities should take into account not only current federal responses to pandemic recovery (*e.g.*, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund), but also existing federal acts that support education-to-workforce learner pathways and experiences (*e.g.*, Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act).
- 4. Remove barriers inhibiting intermediary organizations from expanding education-to-workforce opportunities for students.** Work with agency and community partners, as well as intermediary organizations, to identify existing implementation challenges at the state and local levels. Consider challenges that limit engagement of employers and community organizations in learner pathways and work-based learning opportunities.

- 5. Develop program-quality indicators for intermediary organizations tied to state reporting metrics.** Contractual partnerships with intermediary organizations should include specific program-quality indicators that reflect state K–12 student postsecondary and career readiness priorities and metrics. A formal partnership should also outline data collection and reporting methods that an intermediary will use to ensure data integrity and full alignment with state metrics.
- 6. Regularly engage with intermediary organizations.** Facilitate regular check-ins and information gathering sessions with intermediary organizations to determine their impact and identify any policy or program adjustments that are needed to better support intermediaries in achieving the agreed-upon goals. Allow for ongoing constructive feedback from all parties to support transparency and program integrity.



INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATION PROFILES

SPOTLIGHT: Rutherford Works

“For over eight years, Rutherford Works and the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce have worked in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Education and its commissioners to strengthen the linkages between education and industry. The successes we have had as an intermediary organization at the local level are a reflection of the vision, leadership, and support provided by the department over the years.”

–Beth Duffield, senior vice president of education and workforce development, Rutherford Works

Lead:

Beth Duffield, senior vice president of education and workforce development, Rutherford Works, Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce

Region:

Rutherford County and a sub-region of southern middle Tennessee

Charge:

Rutherford Works is led by a regional/local chamber of commerce with the specific purpose of serving as an intermediary organization between education and workforce. It pursues a portfolio of programs focused primarily on middle and high school, with some programming at technical and community colleges.

Rutherford Works has been an intermediary for the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) for a number of years and has been a leading voice in advising the department on approaches to engage other regional/local organizations as intermediaries. In that role, Rutherford Works has promoted the department’s Tennessee Pathways initiative and has supported and facilitated the department’s statewide work-based learning program with regional/local partners.

Primary State/Local Agency Partners:

- TDOE—currently under the leadership of Penny Schwinn and formerly led by Candice McQueen and Kevin Huffman, all of whom are members or alumni of Chiefs for Change
- Rutherford County Schools and Murfreesboro City Schools
- Tennessee College of Applied Technology Murfreesboro/Motlow State Community College
- Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development

Targeted Initiatives and Services: High Level

In support of TDOE’s priorities, Rutherford Works focuses on bringing area “businesses and education partners together to collaborate on (a) closing skills gaps and (b) building the future of the workforce in Rutherford County.”

Specific Initiatives/Supports:

- Middle school: eighth-grade career fairs
- High school: internships, jobs fair, youth leadership
- Educators: teacher externships, resource repository

Results: High Level

2015–2020

Industry Engagement

- 120 active employer partners serving on Rutherford Works Industry Councils (construction, health care, IT, manufacturing, supply chain management)
- 600+ unique employer engagements

Work-Based Learning

- 200+ high school interns worked more than 14,400 hours in 75+ different positions.
- 2,000+ seniors participated in job-ready workshops and job fairs.

Career Exploration

- 15,000+ eighth graders experienced pathway fairs.

Educators

- Teacher externship: 250+ teachers have completed the program.
- 230+ educators participated in professional learning on career advising and labor market assessment.

We asked: What is important to know as an intermediary?

Capacity and structure. Any organization wishing to serve as an intermediary for a state department of education must have the capacity and structure on the front end to provide the requested deliverables. You cannot “build the plane while flying it.” An organization should also have in place its purpose statement and action plan from the beginning, and they should fully reflect the priorities and desired outcomes of the initiative.

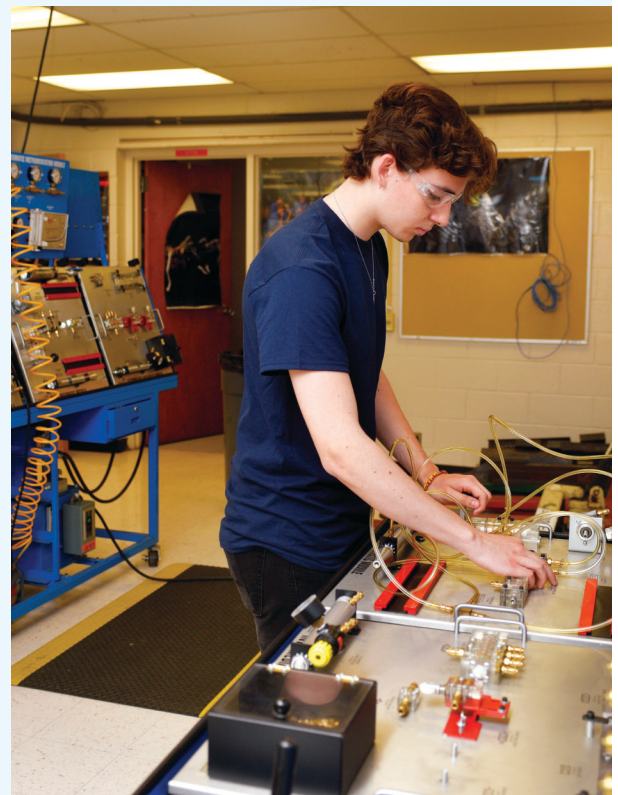
When we were being considered to serve as an intermediary for the Tennessee Pathways initiative, we worked closely with TDOE to ensure we had the expertise and capacity the department needed to drive the initiative at the regional and local levels.

Communication. There is no such thing as over communicating with your education partners, employers, and community stakeholders. What has helped us be successful has been the ongoing touch points that TDOE provided to make sure that we were aligned in terms of deliverables, data collection, and messaging.

We asked: What are ways state and/or local agencies can better support intermediaries?

At the state level:

- **Insurance and compensation.** Codify workers’ compensation relief and liability insurance coverage protection for employers who mentor students who are under 18 years of age and are a part of the state’s work-based learning program. Not having these measures in place is perhaps the biggest barrier to recruiting employers.
- **Cross-agency collaboration and funding.** Establish shared cross-agency measures and funding so intermediary organizations that support more than one agency are able to consolidate work and maximize return on investment.



SPOTLIGHT: YouthForce NOLA

“YouthForce NOLA is an integral partner in our efforts to have our young people gain real-world professional experiences. They work with students in nearly every school, making the connections between what’s happening in their classrooms with what is needed in the workforce.”

–Henderson Lewis, Jr., superintendent, NOLA Public Schools

Lead:

Cate Swinburn, president, YouthForce NOLA

Region:

Greater New Orleans, Louisiana

Charge:

YouthForce NOLA is a nonprofit organization created to serve expressly as an intermediary for NOLA Public Schools. Its mission is to bridge education and the workforce for students by utilizing a network of partner schools, employers, support providers, and community organizations.

In partnership with NOLA Public Schools, YouthForce NOLA helps facilitate various experiences for students that reflect the district’s priorities for college and career readiness. The organization routinely convenes various education, workforce, and community stakeholders on behalf of the district to build needed professional relationships that will support the school system’s efforts around work-based learning, education-to-workforce learner pathways, and early postsecondary credit opportunities.

NOLA Public Schools provides operational and programming support, and YouthForce NOLA also has a diverse portfolio of funders.

Primary State/Local Agency Partners:

- NOLA Public Schools, under the leadership of Chiefs for Change member and Superintendent Henderson Lewis, Jr.
- City of New Orleans
- Louisiana Department of Education
- Louisiana Workforce Commission

Targeted Initiatives and Services: High Level

In support of NOLA Public Schools’ priorities, YouthForce NOLA focuses on an integrated high school student experience both inside and outside the classroom where students receive career exposure, opportunities to build their skills, and work experience. YouthForce NOLA is also working with the district and other ecosystem partners to develop new dual-enrollment opportunities for students.

Specific Initiatives/Supports:

- Middle school: Career days (STEM-related occupations)
- High school: Internships; industry panels and guest speakers through the Employer Hub; career expo/fair; career-prep program; industry certifications program; dual-enrollment program
- Educators: Teacher externships and Soft Skills Community of Practice



Results: High Level

2015–2020

Work-Based Learning

- 840+ high school interns engaged with more than 150 employers.
- 14,000+ high school students participated in the Career Expo—a career fair—and the Employer Hub, which expands a school’s capacity to bring professionals from a wide variety of industries into the classroom and organizes experiential learning virtually through real-time video conferencing, webinars, and prerecorded sessions.

Earned Credentials

- Facilitated 2,000+ industry credentials for high school students

Educators

- Teacher externship: Roughly 25 New Orleans educators have completed the program.
- Approximately 60 educators participate in YouthForce’s Soft Skills Community of Practice.

We asked: What are “lessons learned” as an intermediary organization?

Identify champions. Having NOLA Public Schools as a vocal champion of our work has been key to bringing other stakeholders on board. Employers and community partners want to know and see that the district is an active, fully engaged leader in our efforts. This takes work on both ends so that we are in sync and communicating regularly.

High-quality programming. As an intermediary, it’s important that you perfect your program offerings so they are robust and high quality and reflect what you are expected to deliver. Don’t go for breadth over depth when it comes to what you, as an intermediary, promote. Our top priority is NOLA Public Schools students and helping them receive the learning and workforce experiences they need to be ready for their next phase after high school. By working with the district, our employers, and other community partners, we are able to refine our programs so students can immediately contribute to their community, whether that means going to college or entering the workforce.

We asked: What are ways state and/or local agencies can better support intermediaries?

At the state level:

- **Clear data.** Develop protocols that allow intermediaries, which are working with public agencies, greater access to student and workforce data to better inform the program’s quality metrics and outcomes.
- **Messaging.** Adopt effective messaging around CTE when pursuing policy. Use an “and” approach rather than an “or” approach when it comes to the promotion of college and career.

At the local level:

- **Align with district policies.** Ensure district policies fully support education-to-workforce learner pathways and work-based learning experiences; this includes reviewing district and school common calendars, bell schedules, student schedules, and student transportation so all students can take advantage of these opportunities.

SPOTLIGHT: San Antonio (SA) Works

“Buy-in at the superintendent level is key. While our day-to-day contacts are career and technical education directors and teachers, the leadership and support from [former] Superintendent Martinez reinforce[d] our shared commitment to connect students’ education with industry to build a sustainable workforce for San Antonio.”

–Romanita Matta-Barrera, executive director, SA Works

Lead:

Romanita Matta-Barrera, executive director, SA Works

Region:

Greater San Antonio, Texas

Charge:

SA Works is an industry-led workforce development organization serving as an intermediary between employers and the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD).

SA Works is embedded in the San Antonio Economic Development Foundation and works to bridge the gap between the area’s regional and local workforce demands in select industry sectors (*i.e.*, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology) and a qualified workforce. In concert with leadership from SAISD, SA Works develops and facilitates work-based learning and employment programs for students, as well as industry externships for educators.

SA Works has served as an intermediary organization for SAISD for a number of years, focused on helping SAISD students gain a diverse set of skills and experiences with employers.

Primary State/Local Agency Partners:

- SAISD, under the leadership of Chiefs for Change Board Chair and former Superintendent Pedro Martinez
- City of San Antonio
- Texas Department of Labor, San Antonio
- Texas Education Agency

Targeted Initiatives and Services: High Level

In support of SAISD priorities, SA Works targets the development and sustainment of career-related initiatives that prepare students for career opportunities that fall in high-skill, high-demand industry sectors.

Specific Initiatives/Supports:

- High school: Job shadows, internships, career/job fairs, career-prep program
- Educators: Teacher externships



Results: High Level

2017–2020

Work-Based Learning

- 15,000+ job shadow placements (onsite and virtual)
- 1,000+ internships, engaging over 50 regional SA Works employers

Educators

- Maintain partnerships with 10 school districts in the San Antonio region, including SAISD
- Teacher externship: 700+ educators have completed the program.

We asked: What are “lessons learned” as an intermediary organization?

Strong district leadership. While our day-to-day contacts are with various administrators at the district and school levels, having [former] SAISD Superintendent Martinez regularly voice support for our work and then backing it up by making sure the career-readiness programs we provide [were] are a priority to him and the district, remove[d] a lot of the uncertainty that might exist otherwise.

Clear expectations. Clearly state the assistance you need from state and/or local education partners and community stakeholders. A highly successful intermediary is one that is not passive about pursuing what it needs from partners—whether that is more conducive policies, greater access to information, or stronger lines of communication.

We asked: What are ways state and/or local agencies can better support intermediaries?

At the state level:

- **Incentivize professional development.** Rethink opportunities and incentives for teacher professional development. In CTE, teachers need more industry facing opportunities to remain current on their skills. Teacher externships and stipends for teachers who participate are one effective combination.
- **Evaluate current offerings.** Many CTE programs of study are outdated or are not aligned to the state’s industry priorities. All programs should be refined on a regular basis to ensure they are keeping pace with business and industry, and those programs of study that are misaligned should be retired.