

LEVERAGING CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING IN YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP STRATEGIES

Youth apprenticeship (YA) programs are an important component of a fully developed career preparation ecosystem. High-quality YA programs allow learners to explore career pathways and develop skills that are relevant to industry needs to improve the overall health of the local economy. With support across multiple administrations, the philanthropic community, and national organizations, such as those that are part of the [Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeships \(PAYA\)](#),¹ the number of youth in apprenticeships has more than doubled over the past decade, increasing to more than 260,000 active youth involved in apprenticeships.²

While there is no single legal definition for a YA, programs, as defined by PAYA, generally meet criteria that are similar to those of a Registered Apprenticeship Program.³ These criteria include the following:

1. paid, on-the-job learning under the supervision of skilled employees
2. related classroom-based instruction
3. ongoing assessment against skills standards
4. the earning of postsecondary credit and a portable, industry-recognized credential (IRC) by the culmination of the program

The fourth criterion supports a strong transition for youth apprentices from high school into postsecondary education and beyond by ensuring that they leave their program with currency—be it postsecondary credit and/or an IRC. A common way that YA providers satisfy this criterion is by [embedding dual/concurrent courses](#) as they are developing their related instruction course sequences. This strategy has the added potential benefit of building and strengthening partnerships among secondary and postsecondary institutions and systems.



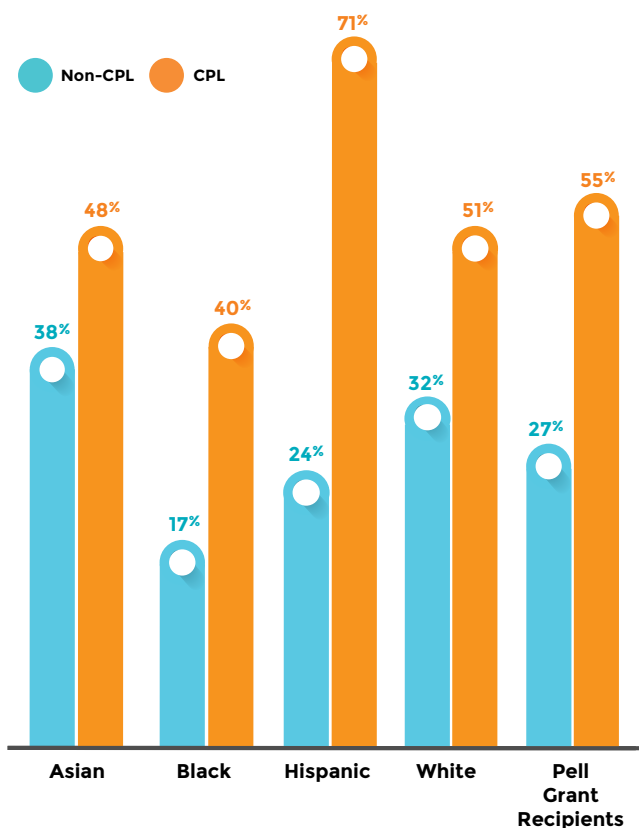
But another available lever to help secondary YA learners earn postsecondary credit is credit for prior learning (CPL). CPL refers to the various processes for recognizing and awarding credit for college-level learning gained outside the classroom. It often is also referred to as prior learning assessment.

CPL has a number of benefits, including reducing costs for learners; shortening their time to earn postsecondary credentials and degrees; and increasing the overall likelihood of earning a postsecondary degree, particularly for adult learners. The benefits are universal and help close access and equity gaps for learners who are able to leverage these policies.

Gaining in prominence in recent years as a way to better value a breadth of experiences and expertise, CPL often is viewed solely as an option for adult learners who may be upskilling or reskilling. However, CPL is a potential policy lever for awarding college credit to secondary learners for coursework, credentials, and experiences as well. Following are three strategies for state and local leaders to leverage CPL as part of their YA programs.

What is CPL? CPL refers to the various processes for recognizing and awarding credit for college-level learning gained outside the classroom. It is often referred to as prior learning assessment.

Across Groups, Completion Rates Are Higher With CPL



Source: *The PLA Boost: Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes*
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED609772>

STRATEGY:

Ensure that college credit can be earned for embedded IRCs

YA programs commonly include IRCs as part of their program design in addition to a journey person's certificate, if one is awarded. The recognition of IRCs provides potentially the easiest path to earn postsecondary credit outside of traditional dual/concurrent enrollment courses as a number of states and institutions have clear and standardized policies and practices for awarding credit for IRCs. One

benefit of this approach is that it improves the portability of college credit since many states and institutions prioritize and include nationally recognized credentials within their CPL policies. Including these credentials increases the likelihood that a learner will be able to secure postsecondary credit for skills and experience acquired as part of their YA even if they move to a new community.

The **Louisiana** Community and Technical College System has an industry-based credential-to-credit [matrix](#), which shows which credentials articulate for which courses/credits at various two-year institutions, often based on the programs available at each institution. For example, in the 2020-21 school year, eight of the 12 institutions accepted CompTIA A+, awarding three to six credits, while two institutions awarded credit for the Child Development Associate certification.

In addition, the **Tennessee** Board of Regents' definition of early postsecondary opportunities explicitly calls out IRCs and encourages its community and technical colleges to award credit based on such IRCs. The Tennessee Department of Education's [postsecondary credit guidance](#) for industry credentials includes that "colleges shall collaborate with the Tennessee Department of Education and business and industry to identify appropriate Industry Certifications and the postsecondary credit to be awarded based upon such Industry Certifications."⁴

Finally, the **Michigan Transfer Network** recognizes more than 500 IRCs that can count toward certificate and degree programs across the state. Learners can search by institution in a statewide database to see whether the institution accepts their IRCs.

RECOMMENDATION: State and local YA leaders should work with their state- and/or institution-level postsecondary partners to determine where and how the credentials awarded as part of a YA, such as an IRC, licensure, or journey person's certificate, are included in crosswalks and CPL policies. In addition, YA programs should consider which IRCs are linked to postsecondary credit opportunities when designing YA opportunities. In some instances, integrating one IRC into the apprenticeship over a close alternative may make sense if that credential presents opportunities to secure postsecondary credit and another does not.



STRATEGY:

Award college credit for the YA pathway experience

Beyond awarding credit for a component of the YA, another approach is to validate the entirety of the pathway and award credit for the full experience. States and institutions may leverage existing

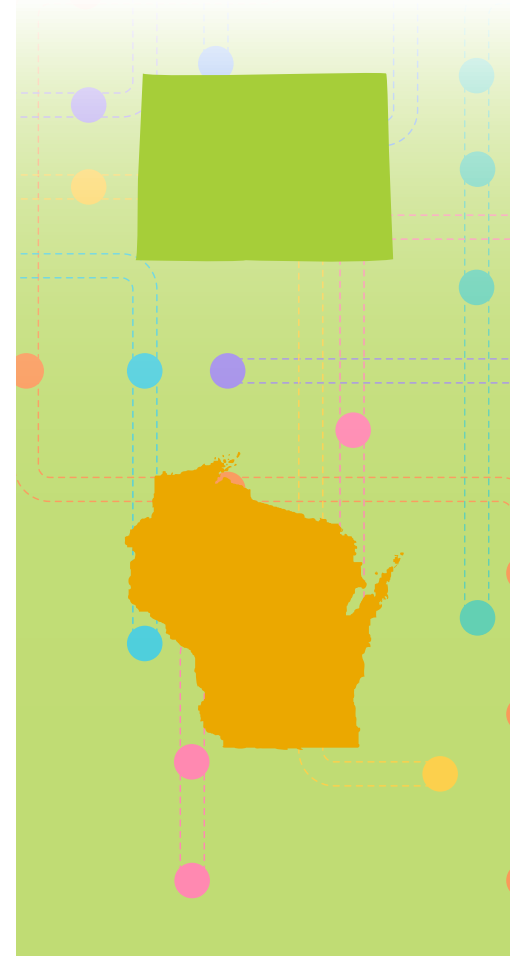
articulation policies or review the YA experience through the lens of a portfolio review, a common way institutions determine whether and how many credits to award individuals coming in with prior experience.

Colorado's College Credit for Work Experience policy enables learners to earn postsecondary academic credit by demonstrating competencies acquired through their work-based learning, such as YA, in addition to IRCs. Colorado recently built on that earlier legislation with the passage of [Senate Bill 143](#), which requires the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) to develop a framework for evaluating the quality of nondegree credentials, in cooperation with other agencies and industry partners. CDHE must also create a framework to identify equivalencies between nondegree credentials and other credentials offered by the state, including apprenticeships.⁵

Wisconsin's Youth Apprenticeship Program is a long-standing model, launched more than 30 years ago. The state's [policy manual](#) for YA includes the guidance that local districts and institutions within the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) should leverage articulation agreements and the WTCS's CPL policy to support early postsecondary credit for youth apprentices. "Local technical college articulation agreements and the Wisconsin Technical College System's Credit for Prior Learning policy provide incentives for the students to transition from secondary to post-secondary education. It is expected that such efforts to bridge secondary and post-secondary programming and credit will continue and even increase. Interested parties should consult with the regional YA coordinator in their area or the high school-based coordinator at their school for more information."⁶ As a result, WTCS institutions are applying a variety of approaches, with many requiring learners to submit documentation as part of the portfolio review. They then evaluate the documentation to determine how many credits and for which courses the credits are awarded.

For example, [Mid-State Technical College](#) calls out that it offers "advanced standing credits," or technical college credit, for high school credits earned as part of a recognized YA program, at no cost to learners. These advanced standing credits are expected to be transferable across technical colleges as well, per state guidance. [Fox Valley Technical College](#) explicitly calls out CPL as a mechanism for giving advanced standing for YA completers in the absence of an existing articulation agreement.

RECOMMENDATION: State and local YA leaders should work with their state- and/or institution-level postsecondary partners to standardize a policy and practice for reviewing and awarding credit for YAs through a portfolio system or an articulation policy, especially for those YA programs that are approved at the state level.



STRATEGY:

Effectively communicate and facilitate CPL opportunities to youth apprentices

Absent having a full CPL policy framework in place, many institutions do award credit for IRCs, particularly two-year institutions. Many others also allow individuals to submit portfolios, which are evaluated at the institution level to determine what credit can and should be awarded. However, CPL processes are often unknown, are difficult to navigate, and put a heavy burden on the learner to figure out.

Helping learners understand the range of options they have based on their coursework and experiences is critical to ensuring that more learners access the benefits of institutional-level—and even state-level—CPL policies. At the same time, the more CPL policies can be automated and systematized to take the burden off of the learner, the easier it will be for learners to take advantage of these opportunities and gain a leg up in their postsecondary experience.

From a communications perspective, developing clear and compelling materials must be paired with a human touch. In a survey of more than 1,000 undergraduate learners, conversations with individual academic advisors on the college campus, other learners, or family members were identified as the main sources of knowledge about CPL or prior learning assessments, not written material or a college catalog.⁷ CPL should be part of any discussion with learners about their postsecondary aspirations and plans.

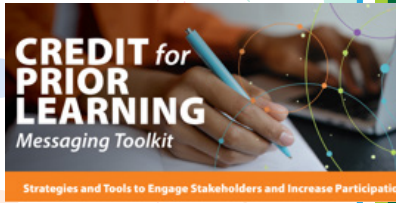
From a policy perspective, automating the CPL process can ensure that all learners, particularly those from underrepresented communities, can gain their earned college credits without having to navigate complex systems.

Ohio offers a range of programs to support seamless awarding of postsecondary credit for previous experience, coursework, and credentials. Ohio's [Industry-Recognized Credential Transfer Assurance Guides](#) (ITAGs) program guarantees the awarding of college-level credit across two- and four-year public institutions of higher education to learners earning agreed-upon IRCs, wherever they may have earned them, including high school. Ohio's Career-Technical Assurance Guides (CTAGs) program provides the opportunity for learners to earn postsecondary credit within their Career Technical Education (CTE) programs of study, as well as a seamless credit transfer process. Learners who complete specific CTE courses at approved secondary providers and pass a statewide end-of-course assessment have that technical credit availability information automatically communicated to any and all public postsecondary institutions in the state.

Such efforts have been strengthened by the state's [Career-Technical Articulation Verification Initiative](#), which is leveraging technology for data sharing and matching across the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and the Ohio Department of Higher Education. The state has also created an easy-to-use [tool](#) for learners to find out what credits they are guaranteed to receive through ITAGs, CTAGs, existing college credit, exams, and/or military experience.⁸

RECOMMENDATION: State and local YA leaders should work with their state- and/or institutional-level secondary and postsecondary partners to develop clear guidance for learners, which needs to be shared with school counselors, career coaches, dual/concurrent enrollment advisors, and other counseling professionals. In addition, advocating for seamless and automatic articulation of credits fully takes the burden off of learners and is a best practice.





To help learners access CPL opportunities more, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group developed a [Credit for Prior Learning Messaging Toolkit](#).

While the toolkit is primarily designed for adult learners, it provides a wealth of effective messages and strategies for dissemination to increase participation in CPL that can be transferable across learner levels.⁹

Endnotes

¹ PAYA partners include New America, Advance CTE, CareerWise Colorado, Charleston Regional Youth Apprenticeships, Education Strategy Group, Jobs for the Future, the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and the National Governors Association.

² ApprenticeshipUSA. (2024, April). Youth Apprenticeship Week. U.S. Department of Labor.

https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/DOL_IndFactsheet_YAW_050124.pdf

³ Advance CTE does advocate for a federal definition of a YA in its federal apprenticeship policy recommendations. See Advance CTE. (2024, May). Advance CTE federal apprenticeship policy recommendations.

<https://careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Federal-Apprenticeship-Policy-Recommendations-May-2024.pdf>

⁴ Tennessee Department of Education postsecondary Credit Guidance. https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/ccte/tsic/cte_tsic_postsecondary_credit_guidance_upd_5-20-22.pdf

⁵ Phillips, L. (2024, June 20). New Colorado legislation links CTE and apprenticeship systems. New America.

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/new-colorado-legislation-links-cte-and-apprenticeship-systems/>

⁶ Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship Manual Regulations, Policies and Procedures.

<https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/ya/pdf/ya-rpp-manual-2020.pdf>

⁷ Leibrandt, S. (2020). PLA from the student's perspective: Lessons learned from survey and interview data. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

<https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-student-perspectives/>

⁸ Ohio offers pre-apprenticeships to high school learners, which generally meet the same criteria as YA, and often are also approved CTE programs of study with CTE courses eligible for CTAGs and IRCs eligible for ITAGs.

⁹ Advance CTE. (2023, April). Credit for prior learning messaging toolkit: Strategies and tools to engage stakeholders and increase participation.

https://careertech.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/FINAL_Credit_Prior_Learning_Messaging_Toolkit_Advance_CTE_2023.pdf