

ARE WE ON THE BRINK OF SOMETHING BIG? REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT AND FUTURE STATE OF CAREER PATHWAYS POLICY AND PRACTICE

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In this brief article I reflect on what we—as a nation—have accomplished to date in career pathways policy and practice. I argue that we should not rest on our laurels and take on the next level of policy and practice challenges until we make good on the promise of career pathways as an equity strategy that provides employers with the skilled labor they seek and individuals and families with meaningful employment, good wages, and benefits. The views in this article are entirely my own and draw on my experience in the Obama Administration (2009-2017) and my roles prior to that as the state director for the Office of Adult and Career and Technical Education in Rhode Island. In describing policy developments, I did not opt for creating a historical chronicling of all events. Instead, I used events that I have perceived as significant contributors to the federal policy framework that has emerged over time.

LET'S ACKNOWLEDGE THE GREAT WORK THAT DROVE THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEDERAL POLICY FOR CAREER PATHWAYS

Up until the late 2000s, there was very little in terms of federal policy or investments pertaining specifically to career pathways for youth and adults. There were the remnants of workplace literacy investments, which had been significant in the 1980s and 1990s. There were residual school-to-career efforts initially authorized by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, which expired in 2001. There was some funding for workplace education and incumbent worker training through the programs authorized by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. And, there were some isolated, uncoordinated investments by federal agencies in education and training programs for youth and adults.

In the 2000s, however, there were several developments in both the public and private sectors that, in hindsight, were preludes to the full emergence of a federal policy framework for career pathway program and system development. I share some of these developments below for illustrative purposes.

Most of the innovative work focused on adults was seeded by philanthropy (e.g., Shifting Gears and Accelerating Opportunity), state innovations (e.g., Washington's I-BEST and Minnesota's Fast TRAC), or locally-driven by strong partnerships between educators, non-profits, and employers (e.g., Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago). On the federal side, the introduction of *programs of study* in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education

Act of 2006 was a critical development. The 2006 Law called upon states to create sequences of academic and Career Technical Education (CTE) coursework to help students attain a postsecondary degree or industry-recognized certificate or credential. Advance CTE, the association of state directors of CTE, took this construct and developed programs of study that spanned secondary and postsecondary by design and tied these programs of study to career pathways in career clusters to assist states and local practitioners in implementation. Roughly around the same time, the United States Department of Health and Human Services initiated in 2007 the *Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education* project (PACE), a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of promising strategies for increasing employment and self-sufficiency among low-income families. The PACE team came to focus on career pathways as the main intervention framework to study. The Office of Career and Technical Education, then still the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, began a series of modest technical assistance investments using its national activities resources authorized under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act to advance the ideas of integrated education and training programs and career pathways for adults. The Employment and Training Administration at the United States Department of Labor, using resources from discretionary programs and resources from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, invested in pathways out of poverty and career and social pathways leading to economic self-sufficiency.

By the late 2000s, these initiatives had created lots of momentum and “buzz” in our capital, but questions started coming up because these initiatives weren’t necessarily coordinated or tied together into a publicly supported talent development strategy.¹ Leading research, policy and advocacy organizations in both the public and private sectors developed policy recommendations in the context of the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 that spoke directly to the need for greater connections between various education, training, human services agencies, and the private sector and to the need for shared accountability measures and for greater alignment between various programs in order to create college and career pathways for youth and adults. In retrospect, these concerns taken together is what gave rise to the development of a comprehensive policy framework for career pathways.

LET’S CELEBRATE THE EMERGENCE OF A FEDERAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CAREER PATHWAYS

In the decade that followed, policy development for career pathways accelerated and practice matured ultimately resulting in the codification of career pathways in statute with implementation expectations at scale. Leading up to the codification of career pathways in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, there were several key “events”

¹ The private sector uses terms such as talent development and talent pipeline development. These are demand-side phrases for what the public sector understands as career pathways.

that facilitated the definition and eventual adoption of federal career pathways policy and practice. I offer a chronological account of select reports, policies, programs, and funding opportunities that, at least in my mind, were preludes to the federal policy framework for career pathways that is known today.

In 2011, Harvard University released *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge to Prepare Young Americans for the 21st Century*, launched the Pathways to Prosperity Project, and subsequently partnered with Jobs for the Future to develop a network of practitioners in 14 states (to date) to build college and career pathways for youth.

In October 2011, the first round of the U.S. Department of Labor's *Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT)* grant program was kicked off. Congress had authorized the TAACCCT grant program as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to increase the capacity of community colleges to meet local and regional labor demand for a skilled workforce. The Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, signed in March 2010, provided the TAACCCT program with nearly \$2 billion in funding over fiscal years 2011-2014, or approximately \$500 million annually over four rounds of grants. DOL, which administers the grants, funded a total of 256 three- to four-year grants to institutions of higher education offering programs that can be completed in two years or less. This is a major investment to increase the ability of community colleges to address the challenges of today's workforce. Grants are designed to help workers eligible for training under the TAA for Workers program, as well as a broad range of other adults. "Through TAACCCT, community colleges have developed or redesigned nearly 2,600 Programs of Study to help adults learn skills that lead to family-supporting jobs. Each college or consortium of colleges developed programs of study aligned with local and regional business needs, which were identified through partnerships formed or strengthened with grant funds. To help adult students obtain industry-recognized credentials more quickly, colleges are using TAACCCT funding to innovate with strategies such as career pathways, credit for prior learning, competency-based models, online training, and strong student support systems. The curriculum and other learning materials developed by TAACCCT grantees are being made widely available to all types of training providers on SkillsCommons.org."²

The release of *Investing in America's Future: A Blueprint for Transforming Career and Technical Education* by the United States Department of Education in April 2012 introduced a set of principles to increase the responsiveness of programs to the demand side, enhance equity and quality, and promote greater collaboration between various segments of the education and workforce development systems and between the public and private sectors including business, industry, and labor market intermediaries.

In that same month, the federal agencies of Labor, Education, and Health and Human

2 <https://doleta.gov/taaccct/>

Services issued joint guidance (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/ten-attachment.pdf>) around career pathways. In the guidance, career pathways is defined as a series of connected education and training strategies and support services that enable individuals to secure industry relevant certification, obtain employment within an occupational area, and advance to higher levels of future education and employment in that area. The agencies established an interagency working group and began to increase and coordinate their programmatic, technical assistance, and research investments. They also partnered with external organizations such as the National Governors Association, foundations such as the Joyce Foundation, and leading research organizations such as Abt Associates on a series of national dialogues on career pathways exploring issues of evidence, practice, and policy. As a result of this joint letter, many states took executive or legislative actions to replicate the interagency collaboration modeled by federal agencies at the state levels.

Also in 2012, the Center for Law and Social Policy launched the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways, funded by the Joyce Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Greater Twin Cities United Way, to help state and local/regional partnerships strengthen their career pathway systems. This Alliance developed a set of indicators to measure the quality, outcomes, and impacts of career pathway programs and systems.

In 2013, the National Governors Association and its partners, the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce and the National Skills Coalition, released *State Sector Strategies Coming of Age: Implications for State Workforce Policymakers* in which it introduced a framework that articulated the relationships between and showed the integration of Career Pathway Programs, Sector Strategies, and Industry Clusters. This was a significant contribution, as there had been inadequate clarity up to that point regarding how economic development, sector development, and career pathway strategies relate to and support each other.

In November of 2013, the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education launched the Youth CareerConnect grant program to encourage America's school districts, institutions of higher education, the workforce investment system, and their partners to scale up evidence-based high school models that would transform the high school experience for America's youth. The program's intent was to "strengthen America's talent pipeline through *Integrated Academic and Career-Focused Learning*; Work-Based Learning and Exposure to the World of Work; Robust Employer Engagement; Individualized Career and Academic Counseling; and Integration of Postsecondary Education and Training."³

In December of 2013, JPMorgan Chase launched *New Skills at Work*, a five-year \$250 million global initiative to leverage its resources, expertise, and global reach to help inform and accelerate efforts to support demand-driven skills training for adults. Additionally, JPMorgan Chase launched a program to expand skills—based education for young people—*New Skills for*

3 <https://doleta.gov/ycc/>

Youth—which is a \$75 million program to help solve the youth unemployment crisis.

On Capitol Hill, leading members of Congress, such as Senator Murray and others, started introducing career pathway bills and in spring 2014, the bi-partisan Senate HELP Committee team picked up its last Workforce Investment Act reauthorization conversation and sent the WIOA to President Obama to sign, which he did on July 22, 2014. A federal definition of career pathways was formally codified in WIOA, intended to improve systems alignment, and expectations were articulated for state and local workforce boards to build career pathway systems. On the same day, Vice President Biden released *Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity* that further validated the importance of career pathways as a critical element of a demand-driven talent development system.

In December 2014, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 gave career pathways an additional legislative boost. It helped reopen the door to opportunity in postsecondary education by changing the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA), to partially restore what is known as the “ability to benefit (ATB) alternatives.” This law changed the HEA to allow a student who did not receive a high school diploma (or its recognized equivalent), or who did not complete a secondary school education in a home-school setting, to be eligible for Title IV financial aid through enrollment in an eligible career pathway program.

In January 2015, President Obama launched *UpSkill America* and called on businesses across the country “to help workers of all ages earn a shot at better, high-paying jobs, even if they don’t have higher education.”⁴ Since then, this effort was institutionalized at the Aspen Institute. This employer-led movement aims “to expand opportunity for America’s workers and allow our economy and communities to thrive. The movement promotes training and advancement practices to help workers progress in their careers and move into better-paying jobs. Led by a leadership team of employer organizations, *UpSkill America’s* mission is to “recognize employers that invest in their frontline workers; promote the adoption of policies and practices used by employers to educate, train and develop frontline workers; and highlight effective local and regional workforce development partnerships and how they educate, train, and develop individuals for success in the workplace.”⁵ More than one hundred (100) leading employers (e.g., CVS, Walmart, and others), labor-management initiatives, and labor unions made commitments through *UpSkill America* to upskill their frontline workers. Many others have joined this movement since then.

In March 2015, New America launched *Opportunity@Work*, a new civic enterprise to be based at New America and focused on “re-wiring” the U.S. labor market to enable more

4 <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/01/22/upskill-america-presidents-plan-help-hardworking-americans-earn-higher-paying-jobs>

5 <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/economic-opportunities-program/upskill-america/>

Americans to achieve economic opportunity and upward mobility in the job market and workplace. Focused on the demand side, *Opportunity@Work* expands access to career opportunities so that all Americans can work, learn, and earn to their full potential in a dynamic economy. In the next decade, *Opportunity@Work* aims to “enable at least 1 million Americans to demonstrate their skills and get hired—generating a \$20 billion boost in annual earnings by helping workers overcome barriers to hiring, learning, and financing training.”⁶

In that same month, President Obama launched the *TechHire Initiative*, a new campaign to expand local tech sectors by building tech talent pipelines in communities across the country. The President pledged \$100 million in federal grant funding. One year later, in spring 2016, the U.S. Department of Labor announced the \$100 million H-1B *TechHire Partnership Grants Program*.

In that same year, thirteen federal agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, the Social Security Administration, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs, issued a letter of commitment affirming the importance of aligning workforce and education systems to support career pathways. This second joint letter was an outgrowth of the Obama Administration’s interagency Skills Working Group, which launched in 2014 and held a National Dialogue on Career Pathways.

On September 13, 2016, in a 405-5 vote, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 5587, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (the bill that would reauthorize Perkins). On June 22, 2017, H.R. 2353, an updated version of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, was brought to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, and the bill was passed on a voice vote. The bill included the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act definition of career pathways. The Senate has yet to consider its bill.

Finally, the emergence of the *Guided Pathways* movement at community colleges in recent years is another significant development, as it looks at optimizing the learning experiences and outcomes of those who are part of the postsecondary segment of career pathways. As that work moves from theory to more widespread practice, a clearer articulation of how Guided Pathways fit within the broader career pathways policy framework would be helpful to the field.

Clearly, there is lots to celebrate. In a relatively short period of time, our nation has gone from no federal policy framework for career pathways to codifying career pathways in the largest federal statute that authorizes activities and funding in the public workforce

⁶ <http://www.opportunityatwork.org/about-us/>

development system, as well as significant inclusions of career pathways in federal student aid appropriation bills and CTE reauthorization proposals.

LET'S REFLECT ON THE CURRENT STATE OF CAREER PATHWAYS POLICY AND PRACTICE

Today, our emphasis needs to shift to support robust career pathways implementation at scale, continued investments in evaluation, and innovation and ideation.

Supporting Implementation

Technical assistance to those who design and implement career pathways programs will continue to be essential. The federal agencies have developed tool kits and other useful resources to support implementation and have increasingly made coordinated technical assistance investments. They should stay that course so that the promise of career pathways reflected in the policies in WIOA becomes a promise kept in implementation.

The career pathway system development expectations in the law will require enhanced resources and technical assistance. The level of cross-sector, cross-system, and within-system segment alignment and collaboration that is needed is significant. This is not about renaming old programs as career pathway programs and bundling them to claim the establishment of a system. It is about state and local leaders in both the public and private sectors working together to design pathways that span, include, and leverage state, local, and private resources from various education, training, health and human service agencies and from business, industry, and intermediaries such as labor management initiatives. Those collaborations will clarify how each player contributes to the pathway and how these pathways are nested in sector strategies that support economic development and growth.

One next-level challenge in this work will be to further develop the demand side components of pathways. With the growing interest in apprenticeship, a truly demand-driven and demand-/employer-funded career pathway component, we are beginning that work. Closer collaboration with our businesses and industry beyond apprenticeships is next so we can make the learning firms support an integral part of the pathway. We have made huge strides on the supply side with the pre-employment segments of pathways, but now we need to do a better job of connecting the work on the demand side that leading forward-thinking employers are pursuing as part of their long-term talent pipeline development efforts. This demand-side activity is significant. Walmart and the Walmart Foundation, for instance committed to unlocking the full potential of the U.S. retail workforce. Starting with their own associates, Walmart has invested \$2.7 billion over two years in higher wages, education, and training. Together with the Walmart Foundation, the company is investing \$100 million in systems that help create economic mobility within and beyond retail. Some investments have included issues of pathways and credentialing in the retail sector. As policy and funding

responsibilities and federal authority are devolving to the state and local levels, greater involvement of the private sector in local and state career pathway system development work is necessary. A great starting place is making connections with the talent strategies of these forward-thinking employers.

Maintaining Investments in Evaluation

As implementation evolves, federal, state, and local policy makers, funders, and practitioners want to know what the outcomes of career pathway programs are and what the impact is of the career pathway systems we create. Evidence is needed that shows whether and how career pathway programs perform relative to the status quo. Collectively, we need to gather data to either reject or confirm the hypothesis that career pathway systems can make talent pipelines more efficient and affect firm and economic performance in a region. Fortunately, there are some significant robust evaluations under way and new evaluation capacity is being funded. The long-term evaluations under the PACE and H-POC Programs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the recent investment in a CTE research network by the Institute for Education Sciences are two examples. As career pathway programs are being implemented at scale, states and local communities should consider supplementing these federal investments with their own. Intermediary short-term outcomes and impact from the PACE and H-POC programs suggest that career pathway programs can be effective. Longer-term outcome and impact data are currently being analyzed.

LET'S INNOVATE: POLICY AND PROGRAM INNOVATION AND CAREER PATHWAYS IDEATION

Innovating Within the System

As mentioned earlier, we cannot rest on our laurels because we are learning that the first iteration and generation of career pathway programs and systems may need to evolve to meet unmet equity challenges and take full advantage of rapid technology developments. To address these challenges and to refresh the career pathway program and system constructs for the future, we need to engage in policy and program innovation within the current career pathways system and we need to engage in an ideation exercise about what career pathways programming, service delivery, and systems could or should look like in the future. The latter is, in essence, a question about the relevance of the model for a workplace that will continue to rapidly change in terms of what people do, what machines do, and what challenges and opportunities human-machine interactions will present.

Let me start with innovation in our current policies and practice. As of today, we cannot say that our career pathway programs and systems fulfill the equity promise. Resources are inadequate to ensure universal access. And, the available resources from various federal and state programs are not leveraged in an optimal way due to eligibility constraints tied to select funding streams. To address the latter, a policy innovation is needed—perhaps a

career pathways performance partnership authority conceptually similar to the Performance Partnership Pilot Authority for disconnected youth. Such authority would allow local, regional, state, and even inter-state career pathway partnerships to receive flexibility through their tribal, municipal, county, and state governments to pool any federal, state, and local resources that can support any aspect associated with the participation of youth and adults in career pathway programs, and be exempt from accountability and reporting requirements associated with these programs in exchange for an agreed upon set of outcomes. But beyond resources, there are other challenges.

One particular challenge that warrants much more attention than it has received to date is that not all of our programs and systems are designed to facilitate the participation of individuals with visible and invisible disabilities. With the exception of an investment in a handful of states by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, very little is known regarding the extent to which local career pathway programs facilitate the participation and success of persons with disabilities. Stimulating innovation in how universal design principles can be used to create programs that will result in competitive employment for youth and adults with disabilities is one important next step for us to take collectively.

Similarly, innovation is needed in program models that leverage the assets of immigrant and refugees, particularly those individuals who are still developing their English language skills and those facing re-credentialing barriers. Because too often we use a deficit model—which drives selectivity—we are unnecessarily delaying the unleashing of the talents of these individuals.

Along the same lines, we need innovation in the adult career pathway designs of programs that work with adults who may not have had access to or may not have been successful in postsecondary education and training. Particularly, we need innovation and collaboration. Community schools—of which there are an estimated 5,000-7,500 in our country—are anchor institutions in communities. So are community colleges. Career pathway programs—both for youth and for the parents—present an affordable opportunity to link the offerings of these two anchor institutions. Far too few of these institutions have found each other for this purpose. In addition, we need new designs for low-income adults that accommodate their needs to learn and earn at a much greater scale, with much enhanced supports, and with a greater likelihood of in-program and post-program success. The recent Adult Career Pathways Design Challenge, a partnership between COABE, the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education and the Institute for Educational Leadership, with the support of the ECMC Foundation, is one example of the type of innovation that is needed.⁷

A final area of innovation that we ought to consider is how we can leverage the rapid, exponential improvements in technology to address unmet opportunity in various areas of

7 For more information, please visit: <http://mindsthatmoveus.org/>.

programming. Applications based on artificial intelligence will make it possible to rethink competency-based remediation and learning that is fully personalized and customized. It can facilitate embedded assessment and micro credentialing. Augmented and virtual reality applications can optimize applied learning and create virtual work-based learning experiences including virtual apprenticeships. Authoring platforms can be created to facilitate the creation of customized work-based learning experiences and virtual collaborative problem solving using real life and real work problem sets engaging learners from all over the world. These opportunities are here today. We need to incentivize innovations that use these technologies to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education, training, and work-based learning experiences in career pathway programs while keeping the cost for the user low or nonexistent as to not exacerbate equity issues.

LET'S IDEATE AND CREATE A CAREER PATHWAYS MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

Re-envisioning the Career Pathways Model for the Future

We must do more, though, than innovate within the existing career pathways policies and practices. We need to ask ourselves: What do future career pathway programs and systems look like? How might we design them using equity as the driving design principle so we can begin to address persistent inequities and inequalities? These questions get at the heart of how different constituent groups view the purposes of education and workforce development and our education and schooling models, which I argue, were created to accommodate the needs of different economies (predominantly agriculture) and have outlived their usefulness.

With the exponential growth in computing power and advances in artificial intelligence and virtual and augmented reality applications, the question of the durability of the current career pathways model is begging for an answer. It will soon be possible to facilitate access to the highest quality content and fully personalize and optimize learning of children, youth, and adults. If we keep costs for learners down, then that means that we—at least in theory—would no longer depend on anyone in our institutions to be the facilitators of access to content and the attainment of competencies. We would no longer depend on a brick and mortar face-to-face arrangement, or at least, not exclusively. As Reecie Stagnolia, the Chair of the National Association of State Directors for Adult Education, says, “we are moving from bricks to clicks.”⁸ These developments call for a change in the role of our institutions. They also call for at least an examination of what career pathway programs and systems may look like. Given the custodial responsibilities schools have under mandatory school attendance laws, what happens in these schools of the future? What do career pathways look like? Similarly, how do these developments affect the community college model? Or the model our workforce development and employment training institutions employ? Do our institutions become centers of applied

8 Personal communication at the Western Pathways Conference in Salt Lake City in June 2018.

learning where youth and adults can access technologies and subject matter experts—humans and robots and machines—to facilitate the solving of real life problem sets? Do they become “performance centers,” as Parminder Jassal at the Institute for the Future has suggested? Or, will they go away? Or, will they maintain face-to-face opportunities as supported onramps to assist with navigation for those youth and adults who might need significant wrap around support services? Perhaps we should talk less about what the role is of our current institutions in the future of work and learning but more about what ecosystems we need to facilitate learning in the future. We need to begin this conversation.

Let’s go one step further. Remember when hybrid and online learning took off and eventually matured? The online learning field went from participation, quality, and outcome concerns to a place where it is now widely accepted that—when designed well—online learning opportunities can be effective and efficient. With the anticipated developments in technology over the next 3-5 years, there is an opportunity to consider a new way of thinking about “anytime, anywhere learning.” In online learning, that phrase basically means you can do your learning at a location and a time that is convenient for you to use the Internet to access your web-enabled course. But what if we expanded our interpretation and acknowledged that learning takes place all the time in different contexts (formal and informal) and in different formats. Can we envision a competency-based learning system that does both prior and current (i.e., real-time) learning assessments in the very locations and moments where we find ourselves? Can the role of institutions be to facilitate access and navigation to resources in real-time and aggregate learning/competency attainment and credential it? The technology is here. We must have this conversation.

Now let’s think about career pathways in that new technology-rich world. It is almost impossible to predict what jobs will be generated or how current jobs will be affected. That poses a real challenge for both individuals who want a career, a career pathway, and career progression and for those who provide education, training, work-based learning, and credentialing experiences along the various segments of the pathway, particularly since a large portion of the programmatic offerings are still tied to being physically present at an institution. The current model for career pathways might not work well for many careers in that new future of ours. We might have to think about a model that is more about skill acquisition that facilitates continued employment as a job evolves or facilitates access to new ones as they are created and old ones eliminated. And the “leave to learn” model will not work well in that context because people cannot afford to leave work, be without income, and on top have to pay significant amounts in tuition and fees. The Institute for the Future envisions that work and learning will no longer be separate but that we are moving towards a new model that fully integrates both. What does that mean for the way we think about career pathways? How do we begin to build on the cross-sector ecosystem we have today for one that fits this new challenge? We must begin this conversation.

LET'S ACT

There is lots of work to be done. I have described some of that work. There are ample opportunities for public and private funders to seed the policy and program innovation work. There are numerous opportunities for tribal, municipal, county, state, and national lawmakers to grant the authority and flexibility to optimize the pooling of resources to expand access to and outcomes of career pathway programs. There are almost unlimited opportunities for local leaders and teachers, faculty, and trainers to identify and implement program innovations.

Beyond these steps, I believe that it is time for us collectively to begin the next dialogue on career pathways to examine what career pathway programs and systems look like in the future world of work. I am willing to help facilitate that dialogue and invite you to step forward if you are. This dialogue will afford us—in the public and private sectors—the chance to design a system for equity and prosperity that can reverse the disturbing trends in lack of affordable access and widening income gaps and wealth inequalities by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, language proficiency, and other background characteristics and circumstances. The ecosystem we aspire to should work for all Americans, not some. If we build it with equity as our central design principle, it will work well for everyone, everywhere, from the urban core, to suburbia, to Indian country, to rural communities, including Appalachia. ✂