

PATHWAYS TO 21ST CENTURY CAREERS

Senator Murray's Career Pathways bill will help state and regional leaders prepare the next generation of highly skilled workers in our country. This critically needed bill will help build healthier and more prosperous communities while helping youth in America build stronger futures. The proposal encourages the right people – community and state leaders in education, business, labor, workforce, and economic development – to come together and develop, then implement a coherent and strategic vision of how to prepare students to acquire the necessary skills that lead to meaningful credentials and successful careers linked to thriving industries.

Regional Economies and Communities Need Skilled and Talented New Workers

- A highly educated and skilled workforce is one of the indispensable keys to economic success – particularly in this constantly changing knowledge-based, technology-driven economy.
- Yet one-third of our high school students don't graduate on time if at all.
- The U.S. has one of the lowest high school graduation rates among its industrial competitors, ranking 19 out of the industrialized nations.
- Education pays -- Between 1975 and 2003, real average earnings for adults ages 25-64 increased at each higher level of attainment (high school dropouts (-15%); high school graduates (-1%); some college (+ 2%); college graduates (+19%).
- Some economists estimate that by 2012 there will be a "shortage of more than 7 million workers with an associate degree or higher and a surplus of 3 million workers with the least schooling."
- Students need the same high levels of preparation whether they are going to college or to work. And most jobs require some degree of postsecondary education.
- According to the August 2008 employment data, the unemployment rate for persons age 25 and over without a high school diploma rose by 1.1 percent last month to 9.6 percent. For workers with a bachelor's degree or higher, the unemployment rate increased by 0.3 percent over the same month; their jobless rate (2.7 percent) remained significantly lower than the rates for individuals with less education.

Building Career Pathways to Better Futures

This bill will seek to equip high school students with the academic and career skills they need to graduate, successfully enter postsecondary education, including registered apprenticeships, obtain meaningful credentials or degrees, and enter careers.

- Career pathways integrate strong academic, problem solving and technical skills that are aligned with state academic and graduation standards, industry standards and postsecondary education entrance requirements.
- Career pathways are developed in partnership with regional and state leaders in high school and postsecondary education, business, labor, workforce and economic development.
- Career pathways help students prepare for a full range of postsecondary education options and careers and are structured so that students have the flexibility to change their areas of interest while still obtaining the necessary credentials.
- Career pathways include efforts to identify, engage, and reintegrate students who may have dropped out of high school and to provide extra support to those who need it so that every student can achieve the best for himself or herself and their families.

New Incentives to Improve Students' Skills and Futures

The bill will authorize a series of competitive grants to encourage innovations at the state and regional levels that establish connections among high school and postsecondary education, including registered apprenticeships, and successful careers to improve the long term economic prosperity for students and their communities.

How the grants work

State and regional partnerships are required in order to successfully compete for grants.

- **State Partnerships:** Governors can create a new partnership or appoint an existing education, workforce, or economic development board such as the P-16 council, or workforce board. If choosing an existing group, the members should reflect secondary and postsecondary education, business and trade organization, state workforce investment board, registered apprenticeship, economic development, and organized labor leadership.
- **States can apply for a one-year planning grant** to develop a strategy for advancing career pathways at the regional level or a **five-year implementation grant** if the state is advanced in its work. States with implementation grants may renew their grants for up to three more years depending upon performance and resources.
- **State Implementation grants** can be used to enhance labor market analysis; create coherent academic and guidance strategies tied to career pathways; leverage existing funds for youth development; establish and report on performance measures for career pathway activities; and support and oversee regional partnerships.
- **States with implementation grants also can qualify for additional competitive funds** to: (1) improve the quality, rigor, and relevance of career pathways curriculum and train teachers in the new curriculum; (2) modernize the spaces and equipment or other learning tools students use; (3) expand registered apprenticeship programs in new and emerging and high demand fields; and (4) enhance one-stop career guidance and information services for young people.
- **Regional partnerships** are eligible for competitive grants from states to implement career pathway activities and strategies. Regional partnerships must select a fiscal agent for the grants. Partnerships can be newly established or formed from an existing board or council such as a local workforce investment board, or business-education partnership as long as the members of the existing entity agree to representatives from secondary and postsecondary education, business and trade organizations, workforce development (e.g., the local board), economic development, local elected officials, organized labor, students in secondary or postsecondary education, parents or legal guardians, and community-based organizations. They may include such non-traditional members as community foundations.
- **Regional partnerships will define and justify their regional boundaries** which may align with a local workforce development area or an economic development region. Regions that cross state boundaries will be accommodated. Regions with particularly low graduation rates will receive priority consideration by the state for funding.
- **Regional implementation activities** include: (1) community and asset mapping; (2) development and enhancement of demanding career pathways courses in high skill, high demand industries; (3) designation of an intermediary to coordinate pathways, conduct outreach; (4) counseling for students to develop plans for transitions using school and one stop career centers; and (5) development of work-related experiences for students and teachers. Allowable uses include providing financial, academic, and mentoring assistance to students to complete career pathways and related work-based experiences.

Strong accountability will be established, with schools continuing to measure and document specific academic learning and skills, as well as immediate measures of success such as high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education. Partnerships will also report on longer term measures focused on what happens to career pathways students in the aggregate in the labor market.

The National Academic and Career Innovation Center, to be established under the agreement of the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Commerce, will manage the grant program; support state and regional capacity building; and implement a vigorous research and evaluation program to document and disseminate best practices and exemplary curriculum.