



FORUM SUMMARY BRIEF – Learning for Careers: The Pathways to Prosperity Network

An AYPF and JFF Capitol Hill Forum

December 1, 2017

Background

In 2012, [Jobs for the Future](#) (JFF) and the [Harvard Graduate School of Education](#) (HGSE), in collaboration with states and regions across the country, launched the [Pathways to Prosperity Network](#) to reimagine how the education system – from K-12 through college – partners with employers and prepares youth for postsecondary success. A new book, [Learning for Careers: The Pathways to Prosperity Network](#), by Nancy Hoffman of JFF and Robert Schwartz of HGSE, summarizes this growing multistate initiative seeking to ensure more young people complete high school, attain a postsecondary credential with labor market value, and launch into a career. Stakeholders across education, business, and government lead the work in each Pathways to Prosperity state or region, with the long-term goal of creating statewide systems of career pathways spanning grades 9-14. Key sectors of the economy identified for building career pathways include STEM fields such as information technology, health care, and advanced manufacturing.



Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) chats with the panelists

[This forum](#) explored main themes from the book, highlighted how key actors in Delaware, a Pathways to Prosperity state, worked together to develop and implement a coherent strategic career pathways plan, and discussed how Delaware state leadership and prominent organizations played a critical role. Speakers shared insights about how two education institutions and the employer community worked together to create meaningful career pathways spanning secondary and postsecondary education and linked to growth areas in the state’s economy.

Panelist Presentations and Moderated Discussion

Robert Schwartz, Senior Research Fellow, [Harvard Graduate School of Education](#), provided an overview of the Pathways to Prosperity movement. When the original [Pathways to Prosperity](#) report was released

in 2011, high schools were focused too narrowly on preparing students for admission to four-year colleges and universities, yet roughly half of well-paying jobs required more than a high school education, but not necessarily a four-year college degree. At the

*"We want every young person to graduate high school and move on to attain a postsecondary credential of value in the regional labor market."
– Robert Schwartz*

same time, the business sector was expressing concern about a skills gap. The challenge was to support more young people attaining a first postsecondary credential that prepared them for a career in a high-demand sector to match employer need. The Pathways to Prosperity Network develops career pathways that span grades 9-14, enabling students to transition smoothly through high school, into postsecondary education, and on to family-supporting careers, particularly in high-demand sectors such as information technology, health care, and advanced manufacturing. The aim of the Network is to design a system that serves students and responds to the needs of employers and state and regional economies.

The Network has identified four key implementation levers contributing to rigorous academic and career pathways that span grades 9-14:

- early and sustained career information, awareness, and exposure
- engaged employers, providing work-based learning opportunities and curricula support
- intermediary links between education and employers
- committed state leaders and favorable policy environment

The goal is to create a college and career pathways system for grades 9-14+ which allows as many young people as possible to:

- complete high school with at least 12 college credits and a work-based learning experience
- attain a postsecondary credential with value in the regional labor market
- launch a career in a high-demand, high-growth, high-wage occupation
- advance in their career and pursue further education as interested

At the same time, [Network members](#) seek to address skills gaps and talent shortages by creating a pipeline of work-ready young professionals and improve state and regional economies so they thrive and grow in key industry sectors.

Dr. Nancy Hoffman, Senior Advisor, [Jobs for the Future](#), moderated a panel that consisted of Delaware Pathways representatives. [Delaware Pathways](#) is a member of the Pathways to Prosperity Network that began in 2014 with 40 students earning credit in one career pathway program. It now serves 8,750 students earning credit in fourteen career pathways programs. Originally [convened](#) by Governor Markell, Delaware Pathways is a collaborative workforce development partnership creating connections between public education, postsecondary education, non-profit, and employer communities to ensure pathways to postsecondary credentials and a well-paying career are available for all of the state's residents.

Gary Stockbridge, President, [Delmarva Power Region for Exelon Corporation](#), described his participation with the Pathways initiative. From a business perspective, Pathways provides Exelon the perfect relationship with a future employee. First, in the earliest part of the relationship, K-12 students can start interacting with the company's "e-coaches," employees who talk about what they do in their work. Students can then enter a mentoring program and start exploring what they would like to do professionally. Through mentoring, it is possible for Exelon employees to get into the classroom. This can lead to job shadowing so students can experience various jobs at the company. If that goes well, Exelon can provide a student with an internship. "We are learning about them as they are learning about us," explained Stockbridge. Exelon mentors and supervisors spend time talking about what it is like working with the company, as well as working on [employability skills](#) development. The company is also able to learn about what makes these potential employees tick. Meanwhile, the Energy Technology Pathway is available in schools across the state, which is informed by the business community. The idea is that when a student is ready for employment, a local company is much more likely to hold on to that employee due to the long-term relationship built with the student. There are two key things the business community should be doing in partnership with schools, argued Stockbridge: informing the curriculum and providing work-based experiences.

Dr. Susan Bunting, Delaware Secretary of Education, described what the [Delaware Department of Education](#) is doing to support schools in providing career pathways and to combat the public stigma of [career and technical education](#) (CTE). Students need to be exposed to in-demand careers, she noted. The Delaware Department of Education has advisory committees for its CTE groups to ensure industry professionals advise the State on curricula. Because a high school credential is not sufficient for most careers, Delaware's students get support to learn about what additional credentials will be needed. The state's schools and districts are determined to identify local businesses that will allow students to shadow,

"There is a greater need for businesses to open up and think outside of the box when it comes to offering students career pathways."

– Dr. Susan Bunting

intern, and work; and the state has set ambitious requirements to prepare students to have choices beyond high school. The Department has invested in Pathway startups in schools and is working to secure money from industry and philanthropy to promote its Pathway work in the state.

Dr. Mark Brainard, President, Delaware Technical Community College, discussed the role of community colleges in supporting youth after high school and linking students to employment opportunities.

[Delaware Technical Community College](#) (Delaware Tech) has [degree and certification programs](#), each of which has an advisory committee of employers. In addition, the State of Delaware offers free community college. When the pathways discussion began in the state,

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– Dr. Mark Brainard

Delaware Tech was selected as the statewide intermediary to interface both with the K-12 system and the business community. For example, with its [Advanced Manufacturing Program](#), Delaware Tech assembled a working group of members of the Delaware Manufacturing Association and the CTE staff from the Department of Education. It took time to engage employers in a way the college had not engaged them before. Delaware Tech had to work with employers to agree on all elements of the Advanced Manufacturing program, and this was not easy; however, the process ensured an engaged employer base, which provided 200-hour, paid craftsmanship opportunities for the students. “This sector now knows it can rely on 100 students coming out of high school with a nationally recognized certification and 12-14 advanced credits toward a Delaware Tech engineering program,” explained Brainard. Now, Delaware Tech sees many new companies in this sector hiring students in the bridge summer between the junior and senior years of high school.

Before turning to the audience for questions, Hoffman posed one final question to the panelists, asking about challenges in the future. Stockbridge indicated that it is a challenge to get the business community to step up. “We need a broader set of employers involved,” he explained, because “if at the end of the day we are only serving students who would have been

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– Gary Stockbridge

successful anyway, we are missing an opportunity.” Bunting pointed to the challenge of encouraging employers to get involved with students who might not be their typical hires or youth they have typically supported. Another challenge she highlighted is the difficulty of identifying qualified CTE teachers. Brainard noted that over the next ten years 60-65% of the jobs in the economy will require some type of postsecondary credential, which may not be a four-year college degree; it may be an associate degree or certification. He continued that we need to convince more people that career skills are evolving quickly. For example, manufacturing is not “dark, dirty, and dangerous, but clean, high tech, and well-paying” and we need to generate more interest in this sector. To do this, we have to educate middle school students about potential careers in various sectors and the credentials required.

Audience Q&A

What does information sharing between workforce, K-12 and the community college system look like in Delaware?

Bunting indicated this is one of the state's challenges. She said that they are currently thinking of a system that would go across agencies, but we do not have that yet. Stockbridge pointed out that the Governor has asked various sectors to work together on career pathways. It is in the strategic plan. We are no longer thinking about how a particular sector will solve this challenge –the question is how are we going to solve this across labor, K-12, and postsecondary education. Schwartz underscored that having the Governor quickly embrace Delaware Pathways helped build public momentum and made it clear to agency heads that they needed to do what was necessary to make this happen.

How much evidence is there that pathways programs are moving the needle for lower performing students?

“Students are more positive about school and have a better sense of their future.”

– Dr. Nancy Hoffman

Brainard reported that in the first year of the Advanced Manufacturing pathway they had two students decide not to complete the program, and both did so because they chose a different pathway. In years two and three, they are finding that many of their students decide to go to college

rather than to work. They are not failing to enter the workforce, they are going to college. Hoffman explained that longitudinal data from Pathways does not yet exist, as many of the efforts are still new. She said there is qualitative data that indicate pathways students are feeling more positive about school and have a sense of their future, but there is not serious cohort data yet. Bunting noted that this underscores the need for a formal way to follow students across systems. Schwartz pointed out that while the old “Voc Ed” was seen as a dumping ground where “we directed students we thought could not do serious academic work;” now high quality programs connected to real opportunities are being disproportionately filled by white kids, not kids of color. He also noted that in high quality vocational programs outside the U.S., employers play a very strong role. They do so through associations by sector, and their work is about talent development and building a pipeline of employees. Schwartz argued that in the U.S. a transition needs to be made from having employers think of this work as being about community service to being about developing a quality workforce. To build employer confidence, however, educators need to make sure the students participating are prepared.

Is there something the federal government could do to promote pathways work?

Schwartz argued this is about building partnerships that start with labor market analysis, blurring the lines between K-12 and postsecondary education, putting together a plan, and funding consortia, with employers at the center of this type of partnership. Brainard noted that the intermediary role that Delaware Tech is playing was developed in lean times in the state, and there still is no permanent funding source in place to build the necessary staff infrastructure.

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– Senator Chris Coons



Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) prepares to give closing remarks about Delaware's Pathways to Prosperity Network

Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) joined the group for the last several minutes and thanked the Delaware panelists for their work on pathways in the State. “This is exactly how we should be building policy,” he asserted. “States build remarkable education programs that connect young people to opportunity, information about these are brought to the Capitol so that legislators realize they are scalable. We will redouble our efforts to support CTE education and access for young Americans.”