

Chapter 5

Pathways to Professions (P2P): Building Capacity and Linkage for Inclusive Excellence

Yi Huang

Coppin State University, USA

ABSTRACT

With the overarching goal of making excellence inclusive, the Pathways to Professions (P2P) initiatives aim to simultaneously improve quality and value of education while increasing access and success through credential innovations. The chapter spotlights three cases operated under the P2P framework of Community Pathways, Higher Education Pathways, and Industry Pathways, as well as two cases on the horizon that are moving toward institutionalization. While case objectives vary, the overarching goal remains consistent toward creating accelerated pathways for the earning of educational and/or career credentials. Lessons learned are discussed with implications explored within the rapidly evolving educational and employment ecosystems.

INTRODUCTION

With the overarching goal of making excellence inclusive, the Pathways to Professions (P2P) initiatives aim to simultaneously improve quality and value of education while increasing access and success through credential innovations. This chapter spotlights three cases operated under the P2P framework of *Community Pathways*, *Higher Education Pathways*, and *Industry Pathways*, as well as two cases on the horizon that are moving toward institutionalization. While case objectives vary, the overarching goal remains consistent toward creating accelerated pathways for the earning of educational and/or career credentials. These credentials are manifested in various forms such as college credits, certificates, degrees, professional licenses, stand-alone and/or stackable micro-credentials, and digital badges. Lessons learned are discussed with implications explored within the rapidly evolving educational and employment ecosystems.

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INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Making Excellence Inclusive

As one of the nation's oldest public Historically Black Institutions (HBI) founded in 1900, Coppin State University (CSU) is a driving force in fulfilling the critical mission of inclusive excellence for the State of Maryland. In alignment with the CSU mission, the P2P initiatives are implemented in targeted high-needs rural and urban communities with funding support from state, federal, and private agencies. The author, serving as the principal investigator, and the project team has been providing the various P2P experiences and services at no cost to participants since 2016.

Critical Needs in Narrowing Opportunity and Achievement Gaps

US schools performed in the middle of the pack on international assessments with Reading ranked 13th, Mathematics ranked 37th, and Science ranked 18th in 2018 on the Program for International Student Assessment (Hussar et al., 2020; MCIEE, 2020; Rahman & Yee, 2021). Maryland schools performed at a mediocre level with 4th grade Reading and Mathematics dropping to 25th and 29th, and 8th grade ranked 18th and 29th in 2019 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, Nation's Report Card). Specifically, the testing results revealed that Maryland has large achievement gaps based on income, race, disability, and other student subgroups. Over half of Maryland public schools have 40% or more of their students eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FARM, 185% of federal poverty level). Less than one third of Maryland high school graduates are "College and Career Ready," and nearly half (47%) of the teachers in their second year of teaching will not return for the third year (MCIEE, 2019, 2020). The noted opportunity and achievement gaps are often amplified among underserved, underprepared, and special needs populations in high-needs rural and urban settings. These regional gaps are mirrored in the national challenges of unemployment and underemployment (The Pell Institute, 2015) and are ultimately reflected in unequal occupational and life outcomes (Noguera et al., 2015).

Nationwide, policy makers, educational organizations, and advocacy agencies have demonstrated uneven engagement in change initiatives ranging from conceptual re-envisioning to strategic modifications in practice. Despite pockets of excellence, the critical needs of access and success through high-quality education and skills training remain. The lack of systemic and integrated approaches to significantly improve career-readiness competencies is compounded by additional challenges, such as: the lack of consensus on common expectations and tools for measuring outcomes; inadequate depth and breadth of contents and instructional strategies; insufficient opportunities for intensive and extensive practice-based experiences; and lack of rigorous and streamlined career-wide professional learning pathways to develop and sustain a highly effective and civically-engaged workforce.

Blueprint for Maryland's Future

The Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (MCIEE) was created in 2016 by the Governor and the General Assembly to review and update funding formulas for Maryland schools, and to develop policies and practices so that Maryland's schools perform at the level of the world's best systems (MCIEE, 2019). The Commission's report and resulting *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* (Senate Bill 1030; House Bill 1413) call for sustained and coordinated effort in five main policy areas: (1)

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