



# Ready by 21 State Policy Survey: Higher Education Involvement with Child and Youth Coordinating Bodies

As states redefine how they approach services for youth, achieving collective impact across multiple systems has become a fundamental goal. That’s why state coordinating bodies facilitating child and youth policy alignment are increasingly commonplace; an estimated 34 states are working to improve child and youth outcomes through the use of children’s cabinets, commissions or councils.

Given the movement towards P-20 or “cradle to career” models, it is increasingly important to engage higher education within these child and youth coordinating bodies. This installment of the Ready by 21 State Policy Survey assesses how higher education stakeholders in six states contribute to the operation and success of state coordinating bodies, and identifies challenges and strategies for effectively engaging higher education stakeholders.

## The Need for Supports

The decade between ages 16 and 26 is a particularly critical time in a young person’s life and development. During this time, youth make choices that can position them for career and life success. While connecting youth to higher education is a vital goal, keeping them engaged is equally important.

Some youth might be forced to delay entry into the workforce or to juggle work, school and family responsibilities while holding down a full-time (and often low-wage) job. Respected adult sources of advice, such as teachers and school guidance counselors, are generally less available to youth after they exit high school.

Lower-income youth face even more challenges as they transition to adult life, encountering difficulty obtaining health insurance, favorable credit histories and other forms of financial capital that would make it easier to stay connected to post-secondary opportunities.

For all of these reasons, youth need specific types of supports in order to successfully transition from high school to post-secondary education and employment. These include not only academic supports, but social, civic and basic supports as well.

Supporting Student Success	
<b>Academic Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive academic advising</li> <li>• Learning communities and other cohort models</li> <li>• Accelerated/contextualized remediation</li> </ul>
<b>Social and Civic Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High expectations</li> <li>• Positive relationships</li> <li>• College know-how</li> <li>• Service-learning/leadership development</li> </ul>
<b>Basic Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial aid</li> <li>• Emergency funds</li> <li>• Health care</li> <li>• College-friendly employment</li> <li>• Access to housing, food, transportation, child care</li> </ul>

## Survey Findings

The Ready by 21 State Policy Survey examines various practices of coordinating bodies using criteria derived from the Ready by 21 Leadership Capacity Standards, organized into four “Building Blocks for Effective Change”: broader partnerships, bigger goals, better data and bolder actions. For this installment, the Forum surveyed members of coordinating bodies in six states.

### Broader Partnerships

**Education and health and human services are the sectors most heavily represented in coordinating bodies**, and many of these have a vested interest in higher education. Coordinating body members include state agencies and a range of others (see chart below). It is recommended that coordinating bodies incorporate members from a range of sectors, providing positive supports to youth that include more than those that can be controlled by schools, and that often extend to health, housing, safety, positive relationships with adult mentors, and overall positive community engagement.

The number of members participating in a youth coordinating body varies from 10 to 100. Three out of four coordinating bodies include representatives from higher education. Higher education partners include state commissioners and secretaries of higher education; university, college and community college staff (including chancellors); technical and vocational college staff; and foundations that fund efforts to improve postsecondary education.

Types of Partners Represented in this Sampling of Coordinating Bodies						
Type of Partner	State					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
State agency of administration and finance	X		X			
State agency of housing and economic development	X		X			
State agency of education	X	X	X	X	X	X
State agency of health and human services	X	X	X	X		X
State agency of public safety and security	X					
State agency of corrections				X		
Child advocacy group	X					
Governor and first lady		X				
State agency of mental or behavioral health		X	X	X		
Private and nonprofit youth-serving providers		X		X		
Foundations			X			
United Way			X			
Parent associations			X	X		
Secondary school staff			X	X	X	X
Community college staff (chancellors or designees)			X	X	X	X
University/college staff (chancellors or designees)			X	X	X	X
Technical/vocational college staff			X	X	X	X
Family court system			X	X		X
State agency of migrant/ immigrant services			X			
Business community/chamber of commerce				X		

**Partnerships among state agencies are often formalized through executive order or statute, requiring participation from key state agencies, including higher education.** Coordinating bodies in 30 percent of states surveyed formalized their coordinating bodies through executive order. These executive orders not only define goals, but also list required members, including secretaries or commissioners of state agencies and education. Florida has a higher education coordinating council, also designated in statute, which is now working to align with the state’s child and youth coordinating body. When the governor of Tennessee created the state’s Children’s Cabinet, the directive was that

*“All Executive branch departments, agencies, boards, and commissions and any other divisions of the Executive branch of state government shall fully cooperate with the coordinating body and shall provide staff support and other assistance, as requested.”*

**The primary functions that interviewees cite as fundamental to successful partnerships include:**

- Collaboration to improve relationships across state systems and services and streamline duplicative programs and services;
- Collaboration to create programs of study, remediation , etc., to ensure successful transition from secondary to post-secondary education;
- Joint policy development to ensure continuity of services across systems, including data systems, particularly during the key transition points from early childhood through career success; and
- Joint planning to make funding recommendations and to identify indicators of a successful comprehensive service continuum.

These functions are typically executed through workgroups, task forces and subcommittees focused on specific topic areas. As it relates to higher education, one coordinating body has a technical assistance and implementation workgroup that focuses on professional development, training and coaching of educators on how to implement evidence-based programs with cultural competence and fidelity. Another coordinating body created a subcommittee responsible for developing milestones for partnership, educational success (e.g., graduation from high school) and post-graduation success (e.g., employment), as well as overall success in the community (e.g., social-emotional health). One state had a fairly extensive mix of subcommittees to support the main coordinating body. Since members were appointed by the governor, the council designated additional subcommittees to ensure that the voices of a diverse set of stakeholders relevant to higher education - teachers, parents and youth - were incorporated. These groups identified higher education priorities, made decisions about where investments should be made, and determined standards and related processes for P-20 education issues.

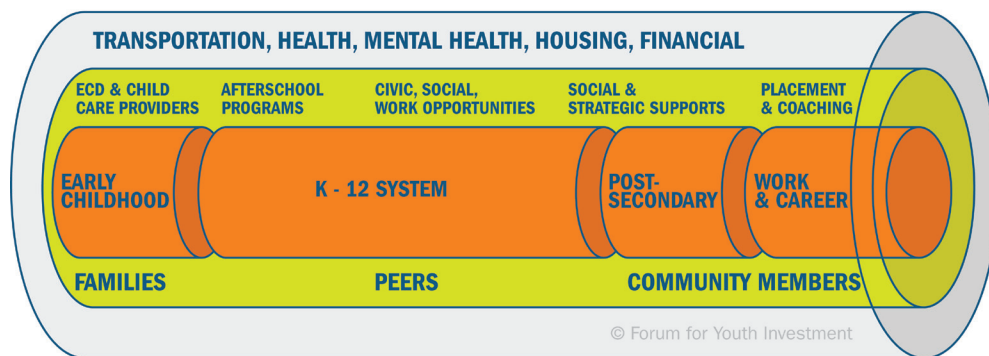
## Bigger Goals

**Coordinating bodies have common goals that focus on supporting the development of children into thriving adults.**

For example, one state’s goal is to give its children “access to the tools and opportunities that will support their development into mature, well-balanced, healthy, and productive members of our society.” Another state’s goal is “Graduation, Ready to Work, Ready for Life.” These goals align with the goals of Ready by 21,

promoting positive outcomes for children, youth and young adults across all areas of development. Two-thirds of states surveyed include similar broad goals in the executive order or statute that established the coordinating body.

## The Ready by 21 Insulated Education Pipeline



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**Coordinating bodies are designed to increase collaboration and align policies and planning to achieve goals.** This coordination is critically important to success toward the end of the Insulated Education Pipeline (below), as post-secondary organizations must work with youth who have already spent 18 years working their way through the various systems that exist to serve them. Youth who have successfully navigated their way through the first portion of the pipeline will face significantly fewer obstacles to completing post-secondary education opportunities than those who have become stuck at various points along the way. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation estimates that even for those high-risk youth who enter a post-secondary program, 75 percent will work more than 20 hours per week while taking classes, and more than likely endure a host of other challenges, including a slow path of progress because they attend part-time, and the potential for complex life disruptions that stop their momentum.

**Identifying shared goals was an important strategy used to engage higher education partners.** To be fully invested in the efforts of the coordinating body, respondents shared that all partners – including higher education – need to understand how the work of the coordinating body helps contribute to the goals, mission or value of their individual agency or organization. Representatives surveyed were able to describe goals that identified shared responsibilities and benefits among agencies focused on early education, secondary education and higher education, as well as between the agencies focused on health, criminal justice and/or social services.

### Some examples include:

- Early literacy is a primary goal of early education and is a predictor of success in secondary and higher education. “If kids fall behind in reading it is very difficult for them to catch up. Without high levels of literacy we will not have enough qualified applicants to create a successful postsecondary system.”

- High quality early STEM education is critical to building a strong STEM workforce. “[State] has a low percentage of young people in our public schools and colleges interested in math and science, and are proceeding on the premise that part of the problem is a lack of inspiration and early involvement with science. We’re working on improving the science experience throughout schooling from pre-K to college. As a result of efforts over the past 10 years or so, we’re now actually starting to see more college students majoring in science.”
- Serving children with special needs is a concern across multiple sectors including education, health and human services, and juvenile justice. “There is also investment in working together to better serve children with learning disabilities, autism, and brain injuries, given that a significant number of children with these challenges end up in our community colleges.”
- Development of the early education and child care workforce, as well as the secondary workforce, is the responsibility of higher education. “[Postsecondary educators] are responsible for educating the education workforce. Most teachers come out of our colleges of education, so any discussion of what child serving adult professionals need to know, need to be able to do and understand will be important to [higher education representatives].”

## Better Data

**Indicators used to assess progress toward goals cover a range of youth outcomes including physical and mental health, education, safety and overall well-being.**

These indicators were often linked to higher education and career outcomes. As shown in the sample below, five coordinating bodies are collecting or have plans to collect indicators that demonstrate that children and youth in their state are achieving success or avoiding negative behaviors. These indicators cover physical and mental health, educational success and community involvement.

**Ongoing initiatives in several states focused on establishing a shared system to aggregate youth data into longitudinal linked data sets.**

Interviewees reported prioritizing the collection of this in response to increasing demands for greater accountability at the state level and to identify students at risk of dropping out of high school, thus providing timely interventions in qualifying districts. As an example, Massachusetts is in the process of developing a “readiness passport” that allows youth to keep relevant health and educational data on a swipe card that can travel with the youth across systems and between schools. Illinois has implemented a longitudinal data system to track children from primary through postsecondary education and job attainment.

**Tracking success in postsecondary education was a challenge for one state because common measures that could be used across different types of postsecondary education were not available.** One coordinating body indicated that it has a variety of postsecondary educational opportunities including college and university, career, vocational and technical schools, and workplace training programs. Finding a common measure that can be used to determine the success across these efforts was difficult.

**“We have all sorts of questions about metrics and accountability. What can high schools and postsecondary institutions realistically be held accountable for?”**

Types of Indicators Collected to Measure Progress, With Particular Relevance to Higher Education						
Type of Data	State					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social-emotional health			X			
School readiness			X	X	X	X
School attendance	X		X	X	X	X
Proficiency in reading and math	X		X	X	X	X
Standardized tests			X	X	X	X
Graduation rates	X		X	X	X	X
College retention rates			X	X	X	X
Access to health care or services	X		X	X		
Quality of health care or services	X		X	X		
Engagement in community activities			X			
Incarceration rates			X			
Employment rates				X		
Do not collect or have plans to collect indicators or measures of success		X				

## Bolder Actions

Despite the challenges, coordinating bodies reported a number of accomplishments, including:

- **State agency representatives are embedded in underperforming schools.** In Massachusetts, representatives from state agencies responsible for children and families, mental health and disabilities are embedded in the lowest performing high schools to help staff, students and their families better navigate the state agency system. This capacity building effort is being piloted in 15 schools across three communities, and if successful will be scaled up across the state.
- **Transitioned youth from the correctional system back into school.** Washington reported that youth exiting the Department of Corrections would often have to wait for school files to be transferred back to schools before resuming attendance. Wait times could be as long as 60 days, during which the youth was not able to attend school. Washington's coordinating body worked to transition from paper to electronic files, and as a result, schools can access these records electronically and youth no longer have to wait to attend school. The coordinating body is trying to replicate this effort for other types of disconnected youth, including homeless and foster youth.
- **Developed a metric for assessing readiness for post-secondary education.** Florida has developed a college-readiness assessment, known as the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT), which is aligned with competencies identified by Florida faculty as necessary for success in entry-level college-credit coursework. The PERT ensures that students are placed in appropriate college courses based on an assessment of skills and abilities. Other state respondents shared comparable activities regarding the preparation of high school students for post-secondary education, including more streamlined plans for remediation.
- **Created standards and guidance for teacher preparation.** Illinois is developing an array of teacher leader standards (e.g., secondary standards, higher education standards) to create a career path to prepare teachers for leadership roles and to formalize core competencies. This effort brings the voice of accomplished teachers to the task of improving teaching quality and student achievement, exemplifying "cradle to career" thinking because it ensures that universities align their teacher leadership programs with a common set of competencies and that school districts develop the leadership capacity of teachers.
- **Improved a scholarship program for child care workers interested in higher education.** Many child care workers in Massachusetts were being turned down for a state scholarship program that offered them financial aid for higher education. Massachusetts improved communication to better identify appropriate applicants for the program; as a result, more child care workers received the scholarship dollars allocated by the state legislature.

## Conclusion

Over the past 50 years, the transition to adulthood has become longer, more complex and less orderly, increasing the need for well-designed, intentional structures that support young people in their efforts to learn, grow and become economically independent. Despite the changing reality of the transition to adulthood, conversations about student success still tend to focus largely on reducing the high school dropout crisis. If we want to ensure successful transitions, supports cannot end when students leave high school, either as graduates or dropouts. This is why it is imperative that higher education be an active and important ingredient to any child and youth coordinating body. The Forum recommends the following strategies in order to more effectively engage representatives from higher education:

### State Coordinating Bodies

- Obtain input from higher education stakeholders outside of government. The interviews revealed the value of engaging a broader set of stakeholders, including youth, parents, foundations, businesses and other private sector entities. These perspectives are invaluable, because these stakeholders occupy unique roles in facilitating transitions to post-secondary education and in shaping workforce demands, which in turn influence higher education priorities in the state.
- Market the benefits of a coordinating body to higher education stakeholders. Last year, the Forum conducted post-secondary education roundtables in Florida, working to connect and improve collaboration between the state's Higher Education Coordinating Council and its Children and Youth Cabinet. Many members of the state's Higher Education Coordinating Council were unaware of the full purpose or scope of the Children and Youth Cabinet. Once this information was made available during the roundtables, participants immediately realized the benefits of coordinating efforts and resources.

### National Partners

- Work with higher education partners to evaluate current initiatives to integrate this sector into coordinating bodies. While there are significant successes in higher education efforts within the states, there is little formal documentation evaluating the success of connecting coordinating bodies at multiple points along the cradle-to-career pipeline. This brief survey merely reviewed higher education strategies in a sample of states and explored the perspectives of a handful of higher education members in coordinating bodies. A more complete analysis would examine the quality of the relationships between higher education members and other leaders to identify the qualities of the working relationships that contribute to effective P-20 or cradle to career planning.

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## About Us

The Ready by 21 State Policy Survey was created by the Forum for Youth Investment in partnership with the RAND Corporation. The Forum is a nonprofit, nonpartisan action tank dedicated to helping communities make sure all young people are ready for college, work and life. For the past decade, the Forum has worked with innovative policymakers, including governors' children's cabinets and other coordinating bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that helps improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis. Over the past four decades, RAND has developed a broad research agenda to address child well-being, across divisions in health, education, safety and justice, and labor and population.

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