

Making School-to-Career Connections

~ Recommendations for State Policy Reform ~

School-to-Career connections focus on:

- Relevancy of academic content
- Contextual learning
- Career awareness for all students
- Ensuring a prepared workforce for employers

Workplace competencies are:

- Skills which workers need, regardless of specialized occupational areas.
- Similar skills required for success in higher education.
- Skills include communications, organization, thinking, technology, and worker qualities.

Recommendations	Agency Commitment		
	Will Implement (☺)	Will Consider (☺)	Not Relevant (☺)
<p>School-to-Career connections are required in grant applications and funding requests from local districts, agencies, etc. which must apply to the state for funds. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals 2000 includes School-to-Career components in its rubric for grant applications. • One-Stop Career Center applications require demonstration of collaboration with School-to-Career • • 			
<p>School-to-Career expertise is represented on the paneling committees for competitive grant applications requesting state funding. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Basic Education grant paneling included representatives familiar with School-to-Career. • Goals 2000 grant paneling included School-to-Career representatives. • • 			

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<p>Connecting with School-to-Career principles is an agenda item for state-level advisory boards, commissions, and councils. Representatives with School-to-Career expertise are members of such advisory boards. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Commission on Higher Education agenda items include School-to-Career components in the teacher education policy and work-study regulations. • • 			
<p>Connect School-to-Career principles to monitoring and/or on-site program reviews as well as to follow-up and technical assistance. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Department of Education Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities include School-to-Career connections in monitoring and technical assistance. • The Department of Labor and Employment’s monitoring of the One-Stop Centers includes inquiries about how the Centers and the Regional Workforce Boards are connecting with School-to-Career. • • 			
<p>Ensure that new hires in the agency have a general knowledge and understanding of School-to-Career and how its principles relates to the organization’s/program’s goals and objectives. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles Schwab and Norwest Banks require School-to-Career knowledge of new hires. • Orientation in the Department of Labor and Employment’s Youth Unit ensures that new employees have a functional knowledge of School-to-Career and how it relates to the Department’s goals. The Youth Unit has also presented information about School-to-Career at Department-wide meetings. • • 			

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<p>Integrate School-to-Career principles into program and organization policy, rules, and regulations. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School-to-Work Alliance Program (SWAP) has been wholly designed around School-to-Career components, integrating such principles throughout all program policies and procedures. • The Governor’s Goals & Objectives for the Job Training Partnership Act have highlighted School-to-Career connections. • The Commission on Higher Education has reformed higher education financing policy to include many School-to-Career elements. • • 			
<p>School-to-Career principles support the organization’s mission, vision, and goals. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community College System’s mission is grounded in principles which are aligned with School-to-Career’s vision and goals. • The Commission on Higher Education’s master plan includes goals on linking with K-12 systems and provided an educated workforce. • • 			
<p>Connections to the Colorado Workplace Competencies permeate program policies. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Colorado Department of Education’s publication “Making Standards Work” contains many examples of how the workplace competencies can be cross-walked with the academic content standards. • • 			

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<p>Use established agency publications to highlight or encourage utilization of School-to-Career components. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Labor and Employment’s quarterly newsletter, circulated to thousands of employers, included information about the 10% tax credit for hiring students participating in School-to-Career. • Colorado’s Job Training Partnership Annual Report has included many examples of School-to-Work connections. • • 			
<p>School-to-Career goals are reflected in program performance standards. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education institutions may accrue incentive funds for collaborating with local School-to-Career partnerships. • Many One-Stop performance indicators are comparable to School-to-Career goals. • • 			
<p>Offer staff development and cross-training opportunities that provide ideas for integrating School-to-Career principles into programs’ goals and operating procedures. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Goals Panel focused a meeting on integrating School-to-Career with standards and assessments. • Gifted & Talented State Advisory committee has included School-to-Career as a program focus. • • 			

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<p>As new legislation is introduced in the General Assembly, and subsequent policy written, ensure that School-to-Career components and connections are included and utilized where appropriate. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Performance Indicators funding legislation included incentives for postsecondary institutions to participate in School-to-Career activities. • • 			
<p>Review established policies for needed policy changes or legislative changes to use state or federal funds to support School-to-Career connections. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After review of the Commission on Higher Education’s Work Study policy, legislative changes and Commission policy were adopted to allow work-study students to work in for-profit businesses. • During the review of the Commission on Higher Education’s Teacher Education policy, School-to-Career components were included in the policy. • • 			
<p>Professional organizations understand how School-to-Career principles can be used as a means to meet the organization’s platform and/or goals. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Colorado Vocational Association uses School-to-Career as a means to advance its agenda. • The American Federation of Teachers has recognized the value of School-to-Career as an education reform, evidenced in a number of ways, including the publication of “Reaching the Next Step: How School-to-Career Can Help Students Reach High Academic Standards and Prepare for Good Jobs.” • • 			

<p>Resource banks and centers coordinate information and provide a forum for organizing and presenting School-to-Career information and activities. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Education’s Standards & Assessments Resource Bank includes information about School-to-Career among the strategies and examples for meeting the academic content standards that are presented. • A Career and Technical Education Resource Center has been jointly funded by Tech Prep and School-to-Career funds. • • 			
<p>Policies, where applicable, should be designed to integrate School-to-Career components across agencies. Agency committees that develop policy should be educated about and understand how School-to-Career principles can impact the agency’s goals. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commission on Higher Education’s Academic Council has discussed School-to-Career and its implications for improving postsecondary education. • • 			
<p>The state advocates for developing and maintaining School-to-Career connections in funding and programmatic policy at the federal level. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado’s governor informed the National Governors’ Association efforts to lobby the Congress to ensure that School-to-Career connections are maintained in the workforce development block grant legislation. • • 			

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<p>Technical assistance, staff development, and training delivered to local education and community entities includes information about School-to-Career and how its principles relates to program areas. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 			
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As you can see, the items included in the checklist present some of the broad opportunities for agencies to invest in developing an infrastructure to support and sustain the goals of School-to-Career. The tool is purposely broad in its scope to fit a variety of organizational priorities, allowing agencies to pursue those strategies that make the most sense for the organization. Through collaboration and focus on common, bottom-line goals, we can jointly increase our human potential and help to ensure a strong future for Colorado and the nation.

Convening focus groups to elicit agency support

Once the checklist had been created, we convened focus groups with key personnel in state agencies representing programs that can/do support the goals and principles of School-to-Career. This step is vital to get permission to travel on the various segments of road to reach our destination. Additionally, in terms of organizational theory, it is an important step both to reduce potential feelings of threat – reassuring agency personnel that we were not poised to manipulate their budgets – and to facilitate future buy-in for the detailed policy recommendations by providing ownership of these broad ideas via the focus groups. In essence, these focus groups are a tool to share information and gauge our audience before making requests for specific right-of-ways to travel to our destination.

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The focus groups were convened by the School-to-Career director and primarily consisted of a one-hour discussion among School-to-Career staff, the agency director, and key agency personnel, including the agency's Task Force representative. The meetings were balanced between a free-flow of ideas and nailing down some concrete ideas for agency policy investments to support School-to-Career principles. The agenda for each meeting included a brief overview of School-to-Career and the resource mapping project, the policy checklist, and our goals for the focus group; after the formal agenda, we encouraged the discussion to flow among the agency personnel, given some prompts from the School-to-Career Partnership staff.

Following each focus group, the agency director received a letter (also copied to the rest of the agency group) which summarized the discussion and reiterated the policy recommendations that had surfaced during the conversation. In the letter, we also broached follow-up. We suggested that the agency team contemplate the recommendations which emerged at the focus group and review the policy checklist in more detail, especially considering collaborative strategies, organizational shifts, and policy investments which could mutually support the goals of School-to-Career and those of the organization. The letter closed by stating that we would contact the agency director, in the near future, to discuss such strategies in more detail.



VIII: *Reaching our destination*

Making policy recommendations reality

Given the broad parameters of the travel permission gleaned via the focus groups, we reassessed our policy goals, outcomes, and strategies to determine where we should seek specific travel right-of ways to reach our destination. These specific strategies will be the fodder for ongoing conversations with agency directors and other key personnel. Given the entire process, framework, and strategies which have been developed through Resource Mapping, our goal is to secure commitments – and eventual concrete investments – from all system stakeholders to support and sustain the goals and principles of School-to-Career.

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However, public policy is not a finite process. Throughout this report, we have tried to describe Resource Mapping as an essentially linear process, with a beginning and an end, for determining policy and other strategies to support and sustain School-to-Career. However, securing stakeholder commitments and actual policy changes entails too many variables to fit into such a linear timeline. For example, a) every agency has its own process, timeframes, and organizational structure which dictate how policy is made; b) changes in state leadership affect public policy; c) budget priorities and available funds dictate policy; and d) windows of opportunity open and close via a variety of forces such as the media, local support, and other means.

Therefore, the final phase of resource mapping will be an ongoing process as we work with state agencies, the legislature, and other stakeholders to secure various commitments to support and sustain the goals and principles of School-to-Career.

Souvenirs from our journey

Like travelers on any long journey, we collected a number of souvenirs along the way. These souvenirs comprise key evidence from each leg of the journey, which, when considered in totality provide an overview of the entire Resource Mapping journey.

- ◆ Resource Mapping is a process which can be replicated in a number of ways. For example, the process can be used for a) undertaking a massive, system-wide project, such as this one; b) sustaining local partnerships; or c) strengthening connections within individual segments of the system (e.g. better connecting guidance and counseling with the goals and principles of School-to-Career.)
- ◆ A diverse and broadly focused Task Force can directly result in a rich and well-rounded set of policy recommendations. Rely on the Task Force as a panel of experts to help guide the overall journey.
- ◆ The interview process to collect the data for the Resource Scan was useful as a process to build relationships with agency personnel.



- ◆ Organizational theory is an important guiding principle for the entire project, especially to garner maximum support from all the disparate stakeholders.
- ◆ Patience is a true virtue for resource mapping. Some steps may seem overly time-consuming – but without thorough attention to all the details, a key detour in the route could be overlooked.
- ◆ Creativity is a plus. Considering every barrier, facilitator, and piece of evidence will result in the broadest and richest set of policy recommendations.

