

Opportunities for State Legislators to Improve Business & Worker Competitiveness Through Skills Policies

Why are Skills Policies Important?

The largest group of jobs in the US labor market (53%) are *middle-skill jobs* that require education or training beyond high school, but not a bachelor's degree. Many American adults could fill these jobs -- and earn family-sustaining wages -- if they had access to skills training. At the same time, companies looking to fill these middle-skill positions often voice concerns about their ability to find skilled workers.

State legislators can respond to both of these issues by adopting policies that are *responsive to business needs* while *expanding equitable access* to middle-skill training, credentials, and careers. National Skills Coalition's state skills agenda outlines seven policies that can do just that.

Seven Skills Policies that States Can Adopt

I. Sector Partnerships. Also known as industry partnerships, these entities bring together multiple employers in the same industry -- along with other stakeholders such as workforce boards and education and training providers -- to address the local skill needs of a particular industry. They are a proven strategy for helping workers prepare for middle-skill jobs and helping employers find skilled workers. States can adopt policies that establish, sustain, and scale local sector partnerships.

II. Work-based Learning. Work-based learning programs blend worksite and classroom learning to prepare workers with the skills employers need. This dual model of training has a long tradition of proven effectiveness. States can increase the scope of work-based learning opportunities available to their residents by enacting policies that facilitate such programs, such as apprenticeship and career and technical education (CTE) programs that have a worksite component.

III. Integrated Education and Training. "Integrated education and training" refers to programs that help people develop or refresh basic skills such as math, reading, or spoken English while simultaneously training for an in-demand occupation or industry. States can support such programs by enacting policies that incentivize and/or fund their creation and implementation, such as Washington State's I-BEST model.

IV. Stackable Credentials. A stackable credential policy allows working adults to balance their education and training with their job schedules, family needs, and

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financial resources by earning short-term, industry-validated credentials one at a time. These “stackable credentials” accumulate toward a higher-level certificate or degree, but allow students to periodically stop out for work or family responsibilities without losing credit or having to repeat what they’ve already learned.

V. Skills-based SNAP Employment and Training. SNAP Employment and Training programs are intended to help individuals who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to build skills, find jobs, and move off of public assistance. However, states vary widely in the size and scope of their SNAP E&T programs. Policymakers can increase their likelihood of success by adopting *skills-based* SNAP E&T policies that use partnerships between state agencies and community colleges and community-based organizations to provide education, training, and support services that put participants on a pathway to a career.

VI. Job-driven Financial Aid. “Job-driven” refers to training programs that respond to proven demand in the labor market – meaning that program graduates are likely to find employers who want to hire them. Job-driven financial aid policies address gaps in state financial aid by making it possible for students (including part-time students, those in short-term programs, and working learners) to enroll in middle-skill training programs.

VII. Alignment. An alignment policy combines multiple skills policies to create a pathway for low-income, low-skilled adults to earn postsecondary credentials that have value in the labor market. Key elements include: integrated education and training; career counseling; support services; a high school diploma; training that leads to an industry-recognized, stackable credential; and industry engagement.

Next Steps for State Policymakers

- **Find out if your state already has these policies in place.** National Skills Coalition has published a series of 50-state scans that reveal the status of each of these policies in the fifty states and the District of Columbia. Visit www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy to view them.
- **Refer to NSC’s policy toolkits to see examples of states that have implemented these policies.** Each toolkit also includes a legislative template that can be cut-and-pasted into draft legislation (or an administrative policy) for your state.
- **Draw on NSC for technical assistance.** Contact Amanda Bergson-Shilcock at 215-285-2860 or AmandaBS@nationalskillscoalition.org to learn more.