

## INTRODUCTION

*Amy Loyd*

Seven years ago, we were in the early stages of designing and launching the Pathways to Prosperity Network at JFF, largely in response to the surge of interest generated by the Harvard Graduate School of Education's report, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. We recognized the immense disconnects between our education systems and workforce needs, the realities of young people struggling in the labor market, and the difficulties business and industry face in hiring skilled talent. In an experimental effort to ameliorate these challenges, we initially brought together leaders from five states to consider how they might individually and collectively learn to create more strategic systems of college and career pathways through forming the Pathways to Prosperity Network. While we expected that our work would be helpful to the field in the short term, we did not know whether the network we launched in 2012 would continue to grow and thrive; nor did we anticipate that our pathways work would provoke a national movement in this critical space.

The Pathways to Prosperity Network has indeed proved to be a valuable addition to the field—not as yet another reform agenda for states to contend with, but rather as an authentic and strategic, locally driven realignment of state and regional education, workforce development, and economic development systems. We initially planned that the network would consist only of state members but quickly received requests from metropolitan regions to join, soon followed by urban communities. Over the years, we have partnered with eighteen formal members of our network and done related career pathways work in another thirteen states. We've learned that the power of the network is the network itself—and the

powerful peer learning that results from systems-level cross-sector leaders coming together to share their effective policies and practices, to brainstorm and co-create innovations, and to problem solve solutions to their thorniest challenges. In our increasingly politically polarized nation, our pathways work is soundly bipartisan and provides a neutral, trusted, and common ground for learning across differences. Our network comprises large states and small states; red, blue, and purple states; and rural regions and urban centers; and it serves communities of all sizes and demographics. Yet, despite—or *because* of—the diversity in our network, we find that the end goal of creating more effective educational pathways that are aligned to industry resonates in all contexts. The lessons learned from our network, highlighted in this book, can be applicable to any state or region considering college and career pathways as a lever for systems building and transforming education and workforce outcomes.

This collection of case studies follows the first book about our work, *Learning for Careers*, in which my colleagues Nancy Hoffman and Robert Schwartz describe the work across our network and the emerging learnings from it. Since then, our network members have demonstrated ambitious vision and goals, and are transforming how teaching and learning take place to better prepare *all* young people for the future of work.

We start this book with two cases of exemplary Pathways to Prosperity Network states, Delaware and Tennessee. Delaware experienced a gubernatorial leadership transition during the period covered by the case; Tennessee, more recently. Tennessee also experienced leadership transitions in its Department of Education: Danielle Mezera, the protagonist in the case study, left the department in 2017, and with the election of a new governor, Bill Lee, in 2018, Education Commissioner Candice McQueen also resigned. However, the strength and depth of the pathways systems in both states suggest that this work will continue to be a priority for new leaders as it was for their predecessors.

Delaware's competitive advantage is its small size and its collaborative relationships that result from everyone knowing each other well. Delaware Pathways has had consistent leadership from the Rodell Foundation and both governors, a single community college system with a clear vision

and mission for partnership and targeting priority industry sectors, and a strong public-private governance structure that is co-led across key partnering agencies and organizations. When Delaware joined the network, it had one pathway in manufacturing that served fewer than thirty high school students; it is now on target to enroll twenty thousand students, half of the state's high school population, in high-quality pathways by 2020.

Tennessee was the first state to step forward and ask to join our network. At the time, it was a state with a long-standing commitment to career and technical education (CTE), but it needed to align and modernize its offerings and structures to meet current and future industry demands. The Tennessee Department of Education set high expectations for its Tennessee Pathways, insisting that programs of study be high quality, rigorous, and vertically aligned with postsecondary offerings and industry opportunities. It analyzed all CTE courses and programs of study to identify those that needed to be phased out or revitalized to better reflect the needs of the state's economy. It also engaged our JFF Pathways team to lead asset mapping in all nine of the state's economic development regions to identify region-specific strengths and needs so that the state could better support and advance pathways on the ground. Tennessee is also a leader in cross-institutional alignment, including through other pathways-related state initiatives such as the Governor's Workforce Subcabinet, Workforce 360, Drive to 55 (its postsecondary credential attainment goal), Work-Based Learning, Tennessee Promise, and Tennessee Reconnect.

The next case study highlights a cross-state pathways initiative in the Great Lakes region. The four sites engaged in this initiative—the northwest suburbs of Chicago and Rockford, Illinois; Central Ohio; and Madison, Wisconsin—had all been engaged in our Pathways to Prosperity Network for at least two years when they were invited to submit a proposal to the Joyce Foundation to join the Great Lakes College and Career Pathways Partnership (GLCCPP). JFF is a technical assistance provider to GLCCPP and assisted the foundation in scanning, identifying, and recommending the regions in which equitable, high-quality pathways were already developing and could benefit from an additional investment to deepen and accelerate their work. Each region has distinct characteristics,

and their infrastructure, demographics, industry sectors, and approaches vary accordingly. The four regions regularly meet in a community of practice to share learnings, collectively working toward ensuring that historically marginalized students or underrepresented groups in the Great Lakes region thrive in college, career, and beyond.

The final two case studies focus on two regions engaged in pathways: the rural Central Valley of California with The Wonderful Company, and Marlborough in the suburban/urban Greater Boston area.

Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep is an example of a highly ambitious, employer-led, comprehensive, and tight approach to developing pathways systems. With a focus on agriculture—and the cutting-edge technology, science, and business savvy it requires—The Wonderful Company is singlehandedly defining and designing the high expectations it holds for college and career pathways. The students, schools, and colleges partnering with Wonderful sign on to non-negotiable terms for engagement. In turn, Wonderful provides strong funding, committed staffing, intensive supports, and smart thought partnership to its pathways partners. Its results to date are impressive, and its keen attention to detail and data keeps it sharply focused on continuous improvement.

Marlborough's work with JFF precedes the Pathways to Prosperity Network: in 2009, with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and federal Race to the Top funding, Marlborough became a STEM-focused early-college high school, receiving technical assistance from JFF to do so. When we launched the network, Massachusetts was one of the first states to join, and Marlborough was the leading region in the state, eager to take a stronger career focus in its early college. In 2014, the JFF Pathways team was awarded a federal Youth CareerConnect grant that funded Marlborough's work, including purchasing state-of-the-art tools and resources for its industry sector-aligned pathways, such as advanced manufacturing; and receiving ongoing and intensive JFF technical assistance in its pathways design, implementation, and improvement. The region benefits from consistent leadership, the coherence of one middle and one high school engaged in the STEM early-college and career pathways work, committed higher education partners, strong employer partners located

near their schools, an engaged workforce development board that serves as a youth work-based learning intermediary, and extensive teacher professional development.

Where are we now with the Pathways to Prosperity Network, and where is it headed? A motto we commonly use when describing our Pathways to Prosperity work is *“Not just faster horses.”* This is adapted from an adage mythically attributed to Henry Ford: “If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.” We are not encouraging states and regions to do the same work they have always done, only more of it and faster. Instead, we are challenging our network partners to reinvent *how* education takes place altogether, which requires students, families, and educators alike to make substantive, and sometimes cognitively dissonant, mind-set shifts—akin to the leap from using tried and true horses to unknown and uncertain cars for transportation. Instead of perceiving career-focused pathways as a last resort, we want high-quality pathways in in-demand fields to become first-choice options—and we want *all* high school students to be held to the high expectations of earning college credit through dual enrollment and participating in ongoing career advising, coupled with authentic work-based learning experiences.

We have learned some hard lessons through our work. The systemic transformation we seek in states and regions does not happen overnight, and it is constrained by the ossified structures of existing education and workforce systems. Changing policy, practice, and partnership structures is hard work that often spans more than one political election cycle. Furthermore, it requires committed cross-sector leadership, so that the work is truly co-designed and co-owned by the stakeholders essential for such pathways, that is, K–12, higher education, workforce development, and business and industry. However, this shared leadership is not commonly practiced, especially across entities with different time frames, constituencies, and bottom lines—and instead we frequently see one organization defining and leading the work, and then inviting other key stakeholders to engage in a predetermined vision for pathways, which does not typically yield deep and sustained systems that effectively serve young people. We also often hear “But we’re already doing this!” as a common refrain in the

field, but as stakeholders better understand the nature of building pathways *systems*, *not programs*, they begin to recognize that this work is more complex than it may first appear.

While we are proud of the seven years of this work, we cannot yet declare victory and march off the pathways field. We have deepened our expertise and built a compelling evidence base for our work, and we continue to learn from the field as it grows. We are exploring and engaging in emerging considerations, modifications, and innovations in college and career pathways; some of our newer areas for consideration include:

- *How can we integrate the liberal arts and humanities into career pathways?* Many of our JFF Pathways team members bring strong liberal arts backgrounds to our work, spanning philosophy, performing arts, history, comparative Renaissance literature, sociology, community justice, and gender and women's studies. We know firsthand that the critical thinking, creativity, communication, and other skills we developed in our studies are valuable in the workplace and readily transferable to any industry sector. We want to ensure that college and career pathways provide a balanced and holistic education, and are not overly focused on utilitarian technical skill development.
- *What role does happiness play in career selection?* Our country is founded on the notion of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as unalienable rights. At JFF, we are committed to pathways that lead to a living wage with economic advancement opportunities, yet research indicates that money and happiness are not directly correlated above a certain income level. Several of our JFF Pathways team members are also parents (and two are grandparents!), and ultimately our yardstick for measuring high-quality education is whether or not we would enroll our own young family members in the pathways we espouse and help to create, and their happiness is close to our hearts.
- *How does the future of work impact pathways systems?* Jobs, the new economy, and the nature of work itself are changing. Automation is changing the labor market in fundamental ways, and reshaping the types of jobs that will be available in the future. Jobs that do not rely

on sophisticated social skills and are routine in nature are those most likely to be automated, and these are often the jobs held by young people and low-skilled adults as they enter the workforce and gain the skills needed to advance along a career ladder. These trends suggest that a successful career arc in the near and long terms will require mastery of a body of transferable skills (i.e., professional skills) that can be deployed in a variety of job settings. We want all young people to develop this foundation of transferable skills, coupled with the ability to pursue lifelong learning and nimbly adapt to change.

- *How might we need to rethink our education systems to better prepare young people for the future?* Currently, forty-seven states and the District of Columbia include college in high school in their state Every Student Succeeds Act plans, and thirty-seven states incorporated it into their state accountability plans. We are considering the increasingly blurred line between secondary and postsecondary education, and how we might reinvent a new form of higher education that integrates the two. Our current systems do not serve all young people well, and the jobs of the future—and of today—require some form of postsecondary credential beyond high school, but the gap between credential attainment and market demand for credentials is still too wide, especially for first-generation college goers, students of color, and low-income students.
- *What is the role of intermediary organizations in credibly convening and connecting cross-sector stakeholders to build and sustain pathways systems that equitably serve young people?* Intermediaries are the hidden yet essential glue that bring together and mobilize the key players in pathways ecosystems and support the development of cross-sector partnerships. But many pathways leaders do not fully understand why such linking organizations are necessary, and even those who do value their role do not know how best to build and support them. Yet the cultural and structural divide between employers and educational institutions requires not only a translation function, but also a new structure to carry out responsibilities that few educational institutions or employers have the capacity to put in practice on their own.

- *How do we pivot to best serve a rapidly changing pathways field?*

When we first started our network, most states and regions were in the design and planning stages for changing pathways systems and entered our network at approximately the same starting point and trajectory in their work. As the pathways movement and the capacities of the field grow, we are becoming more sophisticated in our work with partners, and better at identifying the unique entry points into the work and tailoring our services to meet their specific needs. We are also observing that regions and cities are increasingly delving deeper into pathways-related work—and the work itself is different in kind when it starts with local leadership that is situating the work on the ground in practice, rather than leading with state agencies and state-level policy.

Our hope is that these case studies will serve as useful inspiration to the field, demonstrating what is possible to accomplish in a short seven years or less. All of the strategies in these cases are replicable, but they are not necessarily adoptable wholesale for immediate implementation; instead, quality strategies for college and career pathways systems should be grounded in best practice but adapted to local education and workforce needs. We value the complexity and nuance that goes into any of the strategies described in these chapters, are encouraged by the achievements of our network to date, and are eager to tackle the new challenges in college and career pathways in partnership with our network. We invite you to join us in this exciting work.