



Preparing Students for Successful Employment:

A Recommendation for
Measuring Impact



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Every child. Cradle to career.



Introduction

Income inequality in the United States is the highest it has been since 1928, according to the Pew Research Center. More troubling, the difference in median household incomes between whites and blacks has grown from about \$19,000 in 1967 to roughly \$27,000 in 2011 (as measured in 2012 dollars). Complicating the matter, 11 million Americans were unemployed while 4 million jobs remained unfilled. The most popular explanation for this disconnect is a “skills gap,” or the gap that exists when an organization is unable to fill “jobs with employees who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities.” To help address our country’s stubborn income inequality, we need to better equip residents with the education and skills needed to access quality jobs and partake in the local economy.

For many years, StriveTogether and Living Cities have partnered to build the capacity of communities to build a civic infrastructure that supports every child in that community, from cradle to career. The work to date has focused on six academic points called outcomes from pre-k readiness to post-secondary completion. To fully realize the cradle to career vision, StriveTogether recognized that framing the career-end of the continuum is essential. To help accomplish this, StriveTogether and Living Cities launched the Prepare Learning Circle with the goal of providing clarity around the key transition points that will ensure students and adults are ready and able to access quality jobs after graduating from a post-secondary program. For the success of the Prepare Learning Circle to be measured, an employment outcome must be implemented. It is the purpose of this paper to outline the data regarding outcomes and measures of this employment outcome.

The Prepare Learning Circle

To strengthen the career end of the cradle to career continuum, StriveTogether and Living Cities launched the Prepare Learning Circle, a collective impact initiative to support communities drive collaboration around workforce development and employment outcomes in U.S. cities. The group's primary goal is to demonstrate how communities are currently tracking success along large-scale and ambitious workforce and career readiness goals. This work will bring clarity to which key transition points will ensure students and adults are ready and able to access quality jobs, as well as direct them down the path to self-sufficiency. Five partnerships from the Cradle to Career Network were selected to pilot this work: Mission: Graduate from Central New Mexico; Thrive Chicago from Chicago, IL; All Hands Raised from Multnomah County, OR; Big Goal Collaborative from Northeast Indiana; and StrivePartnership who is working with their partner Partners for a Competitive Workforce in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

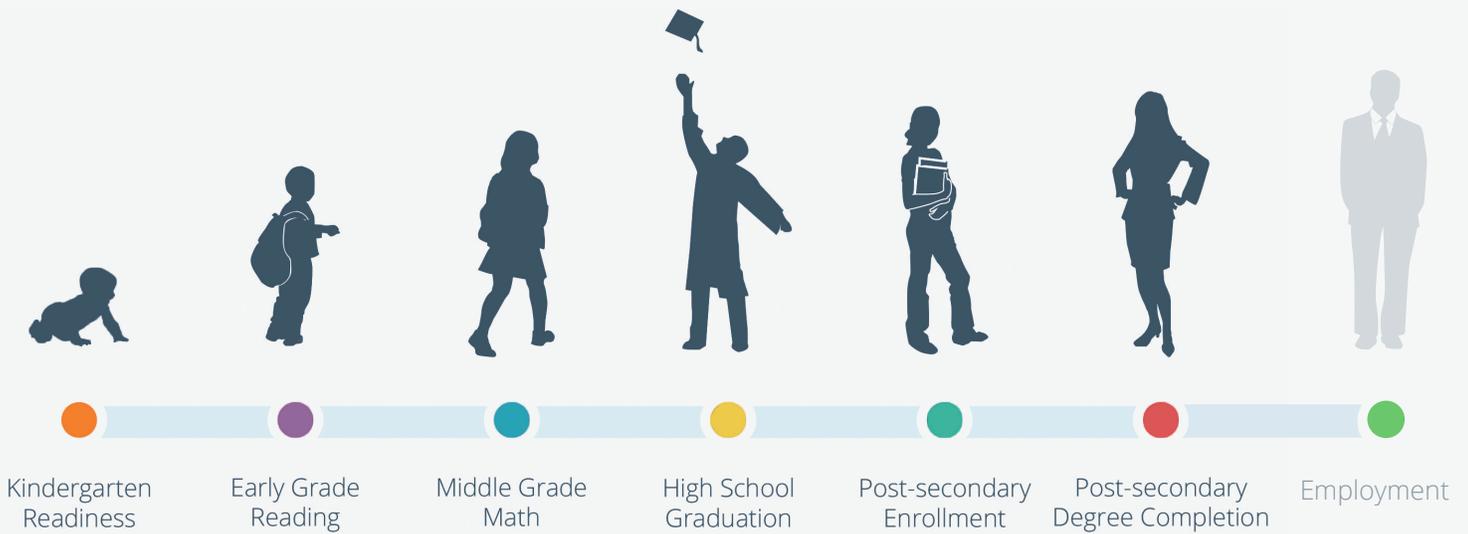
Over the last year, the five communities of the Prepare Learning Circle have worked to create consensus on a recommendation for an employment outcome. Additionally, the partnerships have been tasked with developing strategies to make progress on improving the employment outcome that incorporate private sector, public sector, and community engagement, in addition to a focus on racial equity.

If the pilot proves successful, it is intended that the StriveTogether Network will adopt the Prepare Learning Circle's recommendation for the employment outcome as the Network's seventh community level outcome. Community level outcomes are points along the cradle to career education continuum that are supported by research as key contributors to the achievement of cradle to career vision and goals. These outcomes are selected by partnerships from across the Cradle to Career Network and are reported on regularly to ensure accountability to the community and effective alignment of community resources. To date, StriveTogether's Cradle to Career Network identified six core outcome areas that form a continuum from pre-K to post-secondary graduation. If the Prepare Learning Circle's recommendation is adopted, the employment outcome would become the seventh outcome that extends the continuum to include career attainment.



Five partnerships from the Cradle to Career Network were selected to pilot this work:

- **Mission: Graduate**
Central New Mexico
- **Thrive Chicago**
Chicago, IL
- **All Hands Raised**
Multnomah County, OR
- **Big Goal Collaborative**
Northeast Indiana
- **StrivePartnership / Partners for a Competitive Workforce**
Cincinnati, OH



The Cradle to Career Continuum

The Recommendation

After a year of deliberation and debate, the Prepare Learning Circle has developed a working draft for the employment outcome. The Prepare Learning Circle’s goal for the employment outcome is that a post-secondary graduate will be employed on a path to self-sufficiency, defined here as an individual’s ability to make an income on which they can support themselves.

With this in mind, the Prepare Learning Circle agrees that the goal must be broad enough to capture all of a student’s options for educational attainment after high school, whether it is a four-year degree or a workforce training certification course. The goal is also based on the group’s assumption that while a student may not be fully self-sufficient immediately following the completion of their post-secondary program, that having the credential, certification or degree would provide enough preparation to ensure their path to self-sufficiency.

Once the goal for the employment outcome was defined, the Prepare Learning Circle set out to find the main metric for measuring progress on moving the outcome, called the

core indicator. Over the course of six months, the group debated a multitude of topics, including the consideration of high demand industries and the efficiency of either tracking the number of students graduating from specific majors, or if internship experiences could be accurately quantified. The group realized that connecting students to high-demand jobs and providing internship opportunities were strategies for improving the employment outcome, but not accurate measures for the outcome itself.

Additionally, the Prepare Learning Circle knew that their recommendation had to be broad enough so that partnerships from across the StriveTogether Network could see the strategies they employed to move the lever on career attainment could be represented by this overarching measure. With this understanding, the Prepare Learning Circle settled on the number or percent of post-secondary graduates employed one year after graduation as the core indicator.

The group also recognized that this is not a perfect measure, noting that many states do not have longitudinal data systems that connect educational attainment and workforce participation data. However, partnerships in the Prepare Learning Circle without access to

these data system are working on methods of obtaining this data through alternate methods including engaging post-secondary institutions and triangulating census data with Bureau of Labor Statistics and Department of Labor data. The partnerships of the Prepare Learning Circle were comfortable with the recommendation though, as they found the tide of public policy is leaning toward more states adopting these P-20/ Workforce systems.

Acknowledging the strategies of each partnership, the Prepare Learning Circle made a list of recommended metrics that measure key drivers of success toward improving the outcome or contributing Indicators. The recommended Contributing Indicators include the percentage of graduates employed in high demand sectors, the unemployment rate for graduates, and the percentage of students connected to a career.

Next Steps

The partnerships of the Prepare Learning Circle will:

- Track the employment outcome and selected core indicator over the next year, before presenting them to the StriveTogether Network for adoption.
- Work on refining their strategies and measuring their impact using continuous improvement centered project management with differing levels of data, from personally identifiable data to aggregate-level data.
- Vet their ability to have impact on this outcome, as well as determine whether or not the selected core and contributing indicators are accurate measures of the outcome.

Recognizing that the five data points of the communities in the Prepare Learning Circle represent a limited sample, StriveTogether is working to recruit other Cradle to Career Network partnerships who are interested in the employment outcome to track the recommendation and develop strategies for moving it. Their ability to make progress toward improving the outcome will help to strengthen and further vet the Prepare Learning Circle's recommendation.

If you are interested in working to help vet the employment outcome before Network adoption, please contact:

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Recommended Employment Outcome Goal:

- *A post-secondary graduate will be employed on a path to self-sufficiency.*

How do we measure improvement?

- *Recommended Core Indicator: Number or percent of post-secondary graduates employed one year after graduation.*
- *Recommended Contributing Indicators:*
 - *Percentage of graduates employed in high demand sectors*
 - *The unemployment rate for graduates*
 - *The percentage of students connected to a career.*



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