



StriveTogether®

Every child. Cradle to career.

Cradle-to-Career Outcomes Playbook: Postsecondary Enrollment

Communities across the country recognize that supporting students beyond high school is critical to future success — for young people and for the long-term health of the economy. All students must have access to meaningful postsecondary options in today's rapidly changing world.

To help more students access postsecondary opportunities, this playbook offers strategies for educators, community leaders and partners. Postsecondary enrollment is defined as enrollment in two- or four-year colleges, career and technical education programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials,

registered apprenticeships, military service or entry into the skilled trades. These options all share a common goal: preparing students for careers that offer at least a living wage and a pathway to economic mobility.

With 70% of U.S. jobs expected to require education or training beyond high school by 2031, boosting postsecondary enrollment is a powerful lever for improving individual opportunity and community well-being ([CEW, 2021](#)). Higher enrollment and completion rates are associated with lower unemployment, increased civic engagement, stronger tax bases and better health outcomes.



What does postsecondary enrollment mean?

Postsecondary enrollment refers to the pathway students take after high school that leads to further education, training or employment. This includes enrollment in two-year and four-year colleges and universities, participation in career and technical education (CTE) programs that result in industry-recognized certifications, registered apprenticeships, entry into skilled trades or military service. In today's economy, postsecondary enrollment

encompasses pathways that are explicitly aligned with earning a degree, credential or skill set of value that leads to a career offering at least a living wage. It is no longer sufficient for students to graduate high school alone; success now depends on gaining the postsecondary preparation necessary to access economic mobility and long-term stability.



How to use the StriveTogether Outcomes Playbook: Postsecondary Enrollment

Mathematica's Education-to-Workforce Framework is the inspiration behind the high school graduation playbook's organization and content. The playbook provides research-based guidance to help community leaders:

- Identify priorities
- Track key indicators to measure community-level progress
- Design strategies with stakeholders
- Build collective support for investments in postsecondary enrollment



Essential Questions for Postsecondary Enrollment

The playbook addresses 12 essential questions to guide planning, offering actionable practices, policies and indicators for tracking progress. The essential questions are grouped into five focus areas:

Postsecondary Enrollment	
1	Are students matriculating to well-matched postsecondary institutions (two- or four-year colleges, apprenticeships, work-based learning programs) that successfully graduate their students with credentials of value?
2	For students planning to attend postsecondary institutions (two- or four-year colleges), do those institutions provide adequate financial aid and are adequately funded to offer a quality educational experience?
3	For students planning to enroll in internships, apprenticeships or work-based learning programs (including career and technical education programs), are the programs broadly accessible, aligned to workforce needs and offer pay?
Postsecondary preparation	
4	Are all students graduating from high school on time, ready to successfully transition into further education, training or employment?
5	Do students have access to and complete rigorous and accelerated coursework to prepare them for college, career and life success?
6	Are students taking the necessary steps to apply to college, enroll in postsecondary training or enter the workforce after high school with sufficient counseling support?
Support networks that build social capital	
7	Do students have strong, supportive relationships with teachers, counselors, mentors and other influential adults?
8	Do students have effective, representative teachers and leaders?
Experiences and neighborhood conditions	
9	Do families live in well-resourced neighborhoods?
10	Do families with children have access to public support (i.e., health care access, nutrition programs, economic support, etc.)?
Positive, supportive environments	
11	Do students attend high schools, postsecondary institutions and/or work-based programs with safe, inclusive and supportive environments?
12	Do students attend high schools, postsecondary institutions and/or work-based programs that prioritize their social, emotional and physical development and well-being?