

StriveTogether[®]

Every child. Cradle to career.

Building Pathways to Opportunity

in Appalachian Kentucky





Photo: Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership works with partners across southeastern Kentucky to expand opportunities for young people.

How a Place-Based Partnership is Creating Paths to Opportunity After High School

In many communities across southeastern Kentucky, the availability of postsecondary and career pathways depends on what exists close to home. For young people, the journey to postsecondary education often feels both physically and financially out of reach. The Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership (APPC2C) is working to change that reality. This place-based partnership brings together educators, community organizations and postsecondary partners to create a seamless cradle-to-career journey for youth.

Families across the region have long felt the effects of a shifting economy. For generations, coal mining provided stable, well-paying jobs for workers without

postsecondary credentials. As that industry declined, so did many of the economic foundations that supported communities. While coal has historically defined the region's economy, several other sectors are now reshaping opportunity.

Major investments in tourism and outdoor recreation are creating new jobs connected to conservation, hospitality and recreation. Health care and education continue to be dominant employment sectors, offering stable career pathways for local residents. At the same time, growth in small businesses, nonprofits and entrepreneurial ventures is generating new service delivery and workforce opportunities. Regional chambers are also working with APPC2C to strengthen career pathways in manufacturing and infrastructure. Together, these shifts are prompting leaders and families to reimagine the region's economic future.

Rural Appalachia is defined by its tight-knit communities, deep sense of place and strong spirit of collaboration. Across the region, educators, nonprofits and postsecondary partners are working together to expand postsecondary pathways — intentionally designed journeys that guide students from high school toward college, credentials or careers.

These pathways integrate academic preparation with real-world experiences and support services, helping young people make informed choices, build transferable skills and transition smoothly into their next step. They can include dual-credit and credentialing programs, career and technical education, work-based learning, internships and other opportunities that prepare students for success after graduation, whether in college, career training or the workforce. High-quality pathways are aligned with local labor markets and developed in partnership with employers, ensuring that students gain the academic foundation, real-world exposure and support they need to pursue economic opportunity and contribute to the economic health of their communities.

In communities across Appalachia, students are engaging in hands-on STEM learning, enrolling in dual-credit and credentialing programs and exploring careers connected to local job markets. Families are active partners, helping students make informed decisions and stay on track. Local employers play a vital role by shaping career-aligned learning and opening doors to internships and mentorship.

With shared goals and a focus on data, partners are identifying barriers, improving supports and expanding opportunities. These efforts are rooted in the culture and economy of the region, ensuring postsecondary pathways reflect the strengths and needs of Appalachian youth.

Economic Impact:

Increases in educational attainment between 2010-2020 will lead to \$14.2 trillion in additional net, lifetime earnings.

What could the next decade hold?

(Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce)

A Regional Vision, Backed by National Trends

This work is part of APPC2C's broader effort to create brighter futures in Appalachian Kentucky. As a member of the national StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, APPC2C has set an ambitious target: supporting 13,000 more young people on the path to economic mobility across the region by 2030. This vision is powered by bold action, strengthened by local partnerships and amplified by national momentum. Above all, it is rooted in the belief that every young person should have the opportunity to thrive right where they live.



Photo: Through the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership, students are gaining access to experiences that prepare them for postsecondary success.

Nationally, the urgency for this work is clear. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, undergraduate enrollment increased by 2.5% in spring 2024 (+359,000) from the previous year. Even with this progress, community college enrollment in 2023 was still down 5% from 2019.

College completion rates in the United States remain a persistent challenge. Nationally, only 62% of students at four-year institutions and 32% at community colleges graduate within six years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). More recent data from the National Student Clearinghouse indicates ongoing recovery: community colleges saw a 5.4% year-over-year enrollment increase in spring 2025, yet overall enrollment remains approximately 2.4% below spring 2020 levels. This suggests improvement, but not a full return to pre-pandemic benchmarks.

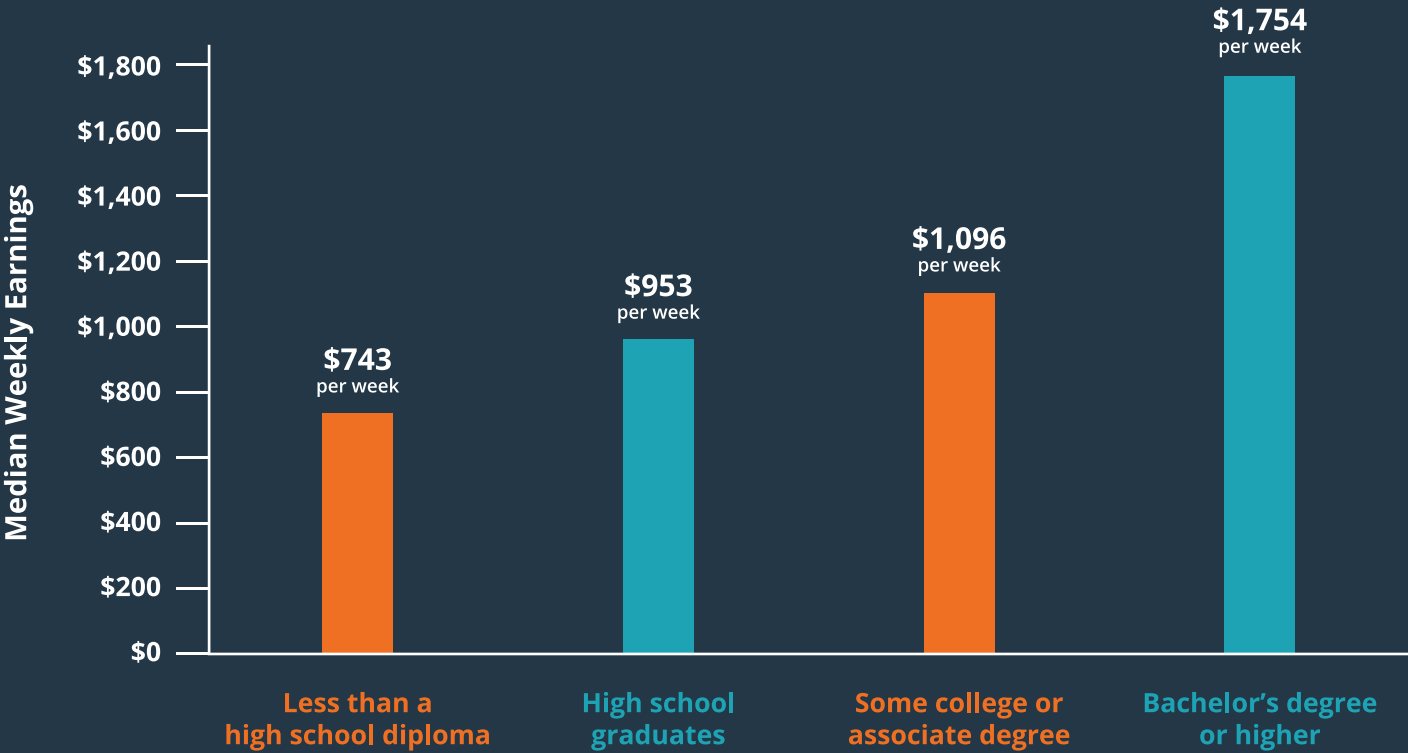
For rural students, the pathway to a degree is even steeper. They are 10% less likely than their urban peers to enroll in postsecondary programs within a year of high school graduation (NCES, 2022). Data from the U.S. Department of Education shows that just 71% of

students who attended rural high schools had ever enrolled in postsecondary education three years after graduation, compared to 76% of their suburban peers. Nearly one in four rural students had never enrolled at all. These gaps in college access, postsecondary enrollment and degree completion reflect the barriers rural students face, from limited access to postsecondary institutions to fewer local career and technical education options.

Access to postsecondary education is one of the most powerful drivers of economic mobility, leading to higher earnings and lower unemployment. In the first quarter of 2025, full-time workers age 25 and over without a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$743, while high school graduates with no college education earned \$953. Those with some college or an associate degree had median weekly earnings of \$1,096. College graduates holding at least a bachelor's degree had median weekly earnings of \$1,754 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Short-term certificates and trade programs also open doors to well-paying careers. About 78% of short-term

Median Weekly Earnings By Level of Education (2025)



certificates are associated with median earnings at or above a living wage within two years of completion, with the strongest results in health, manufacturing and other workforce-aligned programs (Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University). This reality underscores the importance of APPC2C's place-based approach to strengthening the region's civic infrastructure, expanding career pathways and bringing educational opportunities closer to home.

Building Pathways and Expanding Choices

Dr. Melissa Newman, associate vice president for place-based partnerships at Partners for Rural Impact and executive director of the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership, puts it simply: "Economic mobility is about choices. If you want to live in eastern Kentucky your whole life, you should be able to do that and make a good living. And if you want to go to MIT or Harvard, there should be a path for that, too." In rural Appalachia, the goal of postsecondary pathways is to ensure young people have those choices: a full range of options that match their ambitions, whether they lead to local careers or global opportunities.

Making that vision real requires coordination. APPC2C partners with schools, businesses, health care providers and local organizations to align solutions around four strategic priorities: reducing chronic absenteeism, strengthening youth mental health, expanding access to paid work experiences and improving early childhood education. 22 school districts (16 AESA members plus six neighboring districts) are engaged in collective action to reduce chronic absenteeism. This work connects partners with different specialties across the cradle-to-career pipeline, ensuring that when barriers arise — whether they require a policy change, additional funding or a new resource — there is a coordinated response.

"Being part of StriveTogether provides idea generation, mentorship and validation. This work is messy, it's woven together, and it's easy to second-guess yourself. But when you meet with other cradle-to-career leaders who are facing similar challenges, it empowers you to keep going."

Dr. Melissa Newman

Executive Director of the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership

The journey to focus on convening multi-sector partners began in fall 2020. Working alongside StriveTogether, APPC2C progressed through the StriveTogether Theory of Action™, which outlines the steps needed to transform fragmented efforts into a cohesive partnership. By uniting organizations, agencies and individuals, the partnership amplifies its collective voice when securing funding and influencing policy. Over the years, this unity has led to tangible results — from expanded learning opportunities to stronger alignment between education and workforce systems.

This vision resonates across the region. Dr. Jennifer Lindon, president and CEO of Hazard Community and Technical College, has seen what happens when pathways aren't in place. "So often I see students who dreamed of becoming an astronaut, a chef or an engineer," she says. "But because the pathway wasn't developed, they didn't get the classes they needed. When they get to high school or college, they're missing prerequisites in science, arts or math. They start doubting themselves and think, 'I don't think I can reach that dream any longer.' We don't want students doing that. We want students to realize their dreams."

Tee Pennington, first assistant Clay County attorney, frames it as inspiring possibility for the next generation and raising the bar for what each generation believes is possible. "I think a lot of what we try to do is exactly that — inspiring generations after to be better, to be better than what I am — to say, 'Hey, I can be an

attorney. I can be the president, I can be an astronaut. I can be whatever I inspire to be.” For Pennington, this is about more than career goals. It’s about building a culture where young people see tangible examples of success in their own communities and believe they can dream big, knowing there’s a pathway to get there.

APPC2C’s ability to convene and coordinate to make this culture possible is strengthened by being part of the national StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network. As Newman explains, “Being part of StriveTogether provides idea generation, mentorship and validation. This work is messy, it’s woven together, and it’s easy to second-guess yourself. But when you meet with other cradle-to-career leaders who are facing similar challenges, it empowers you to keep going.” That national connection brings fresh strategies into the region while ensuring local efforts are informed by what’s working in communities across the country.

In the APPC2C region, this collective vision takes shape through a diverse array of postsecondary pathways: accredited local training programs that connect directly to in-demand jobs, transfer agreements with universities that create seamless routes to four-year degrees and robust career and technical education that equips students with industry-recognized credentials. Students can also access dual-credit courses, work-based learning, internships and other opportunities that build both skills and confidence.



Photo: With support from the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership and GEAR UP, a college readiness program, students like Morgan Riffe are moving from rural high schools to medical residencies. Her journey shows how coordinated partnerships open doors to lasting opportunity in Appalachian Kentucky.

Together, these pathways prepare young people to take the next step — whether that means enrolling in college, earning a technical credential or entering the workforce. These efforts show students and the wider community that pathways to opportunity can be built at home.

Building Career Pathways Through Learn and Earn

In 2022, the Learn and Earn internship program was launched with a clear goal — to equip youth with marketable skills for the workforce while supporting local businesses and organizations in recovering and growing after devastating floods. As part of the region’s broader postsecondary pathways work, the program creates intentional bridges from high school to college, credentials and careers — helping students connect classroom learning to real opportunities in their communities.

“Our host sites are very diverse,” explains Ismaila Ceesay, project director for Partners for Rural Impact. “It could be anywhere from an attorney’s office to a medical office, mom-and-pop shops to retail stores, local government offices, schools and nonprofits. Interns develop hard skills specific to their placement, like veterinary lab work or administrative tasks, but we also emphasize soft skills — punctuality, accountability, communication, leadership, teamwork — skills that make them effective in any workplace.”

A unique feature of Learn and Earn is its intentional focus on civic connection. Interns are encouraged to deepen their ties to the community by volunteering, telling positive stories about their hometowns and producing work they can showcase. Many have published articles, contributed to social media campaigns or developed portfolios that will serve them well in future applications for jobs or college. “One of

our goals is to help interns see themselves as positive, contributing members of the community,” says Ceesay. “You do that by living that life — working, paying taxes and actively participating in your local economy.”

The program also fosters mentorship and knowledge transfer. As Tee Pennington, who hosts an intern, describes it: “You’re taking someone young who’s interested in what you’re doing and giving them the opportunity to, in essence, follow in your footsteps, whether it’s directly or indirectly. It’s about building those relationships, passing on knowledge, giving back to those younger than you.”

For students like Phoenix Lunsford, the program has been a catalyst for skill-building and leadership. “I’ve learned how to use a variety of Adobe products and anything they’ve thrown at me ... we held a science fair, and they tasked me with learning how to use drones and then teaching kids in grades six through 12 how to use them, to varying levels of success,” Phoenix says with a laugh.

By integrating hands-on job training, community engagement and mentorship, Learn and Earn strengthens the region’s postsecondary pathways. Students graduate high school not only with technical skills and professional networks, but also with a deeper sense of belonging and possibility, key ingredients for economic mobility.

STEM Strategies Driving Postsecondary Pathways

In Appalachian Kentucky, STEM serves as a bridge between classroom learning and real-world opportunity, linking education directly to postsecondary and career pathways. Two standout



Photo: Hands-on STEM learning, like drone training, equips students in Barbourville Independent School District with skills that translate directly into postsecondary opportunities.

examples, Barbourville Independent Schools and the Challenger Learning Center of Kentucky, show how early engagement, hands-on learning and strong industry partnerships create clear, supported pathways for students.

In Barbourville Independent School District, STEM is fully integrated into the learning experience from elementary through high school. Under the leadership of Principal Andrew Roark, STEM teacher Chance Hendrickson and Full-Service Community Schools Coordinator Travis Mills, students engage in project-based learning that ties directly to the economic realities of southeastern Kentucky. Educators work with local businesses and higher education partners to co-design curriculum aligned with workforce needs, ensuring students graduate with technical skills and a clear understanding of career pathways.

From the earliest grades, students participate in programs like FIRST LEGO League, where they design, build and program robots to solve real-world problems, and Science Olympiad, where they compete in

engineering, biology, chemistry and physics challenges — often on college campuses. These experiences build problem-solving, critical thinking and teamwork skills while sparking interest in high-demand fields. By high school, opportunities expand to include FAA drone certification through a partnership with SkyOp LLC, preparing students for careers in agriculture, construction, logistics and public safety.

The Challenger Learning Center of Kentucky mirrors this approach, introducing STEM in the early grades and keeping students engaged through graduation. Students participate in mission simulations, robotics programs and hands-on projects that mirror real workforce demands in aerospace, health care, data analysis and advanced manufacturing. With aerospace as Kentucky's largest export industry — valued at \$14-15 billion annually — the center's curriculum is directly tied to one of the state's most important economic drivers. The Challenger Learning Center also connects students to Learn and Earn internships, giving them paid, real-world experience where STEM concepts are applied in the workplace.

Whether placed in a robotics lab, a health care clinic or a local government office, interns develop both hard skills and essential soft skills like teamwork, communication and leadership. As Charles Bush, the center's office manager, explains, these experiences challenge stereotypes about the region: "There's such a stigma against Appalachian Kentucky that it's dead, it's dying, there's nothing here. But when these kids see that things are happening right now in my community, right at my back door, and I can be a part of that, it gives them, and the region, a brighter future."

Both Barbourville and the Challenger Learning Center demonstrate how early exposure, sustained engagement and direct industry connections create pathways that keep students motivated, prepared and connected to opportunity. Together, they show that in Appalachian Kentucky, STEM learning isn't just about science and technology. It builds the confidence, skills and networks that help young people move from curiosity to career, right in their own communities.

Expanding Access to Postsecondary Pathways

Partnerships with regional stakeholders expand these efforts even further. Collaboration with Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKCTC) provides students with dual-credit courses, enabling them to graduate high school with college credits already earned, reducing both the time and cost required to earn a degree. Technical certifications give students workforce-ready credentials that can be used immediately, while also opening doors to additional education. Because SKCTC is located in the region, students can pursue postsecondary opportunities without the cost and disruption of relocating, lowering both financial and emotional barriers to college entry.

For students like Morgan Riffe, now a fourth-year medical student, dual credit was a game changer: "The number one thing that was very impactful is when I went into college, I had a lot of credits. I actually went in as a sophomore, which was great. But what that meant is, as a pre-med, I dove straight into those hard courses." Experiences like Morgan's show how early access to college-level coursework can accelerate degree completion, reduce costs and give students the confidence to take on challenging academic paths.

"It's important for postsecondary institutions to be part of these partnerships and part of these pathways so we can help students navigate the process and help them realize that college is for them."

Dr. Jennifer Lindon

President and CEO of Hazard Community and Technical College

“In Appalachian Kentucky, postsecondary completion isn’t just a milestone, it’s a lifeline. Through initiatives like GEAR UP and strong place-based partnerships, we’re ensuring that students not only dream bigger but also have the support to reach those dreams.”

Dr. Melissa Newman

Executive Director of the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership

Another key partner in this work is Hazard Community and Technical College (HCTC), which serves seven rural counties. HCTC works closely with local districts and initiatives such as GEAR UP Kentucky to strengthen the cradle-to-career pathway. Together they provide targeted advising, mentoring and wraparound supports to address both academic and non-academic barriers to postsecondary education. Students gain access to scholarship information, FAFSA completion assistance and application guidance — critical resources for increasing enrollment and persistence rates among rural youth. HCTC also collaborates with employers and community leaders to align academic programs with current workforce needs, ensuring credentials translate into viable career opportunities.

Dr. Jennifer Lindon, president and CEO of HCTC, describes why this collaborative approach matters: “It’s important for postsecondary institutions to be part of these partnerships and part of these pathways so we can help students navigate the process and help them realize that college is for them.

“That’s what APPC2C is all about, partners working together to help people achieve their dreams. We want that kindergarten student from Appalachia who wants to be an astronaut to go through high school, get the classes they need, go through college and then be ready to work for NASA or an engineering company, whatever they might dream of. We just want to help children achieve their dreams.”

Dr. Melissa Newman underscores the stakes: “In Appalachian Kentucky, postsecondary completion isn’t just a milestone, it’s a lifeline. Through initiatives like GEAR UP and strong place-based partnerships, we’re

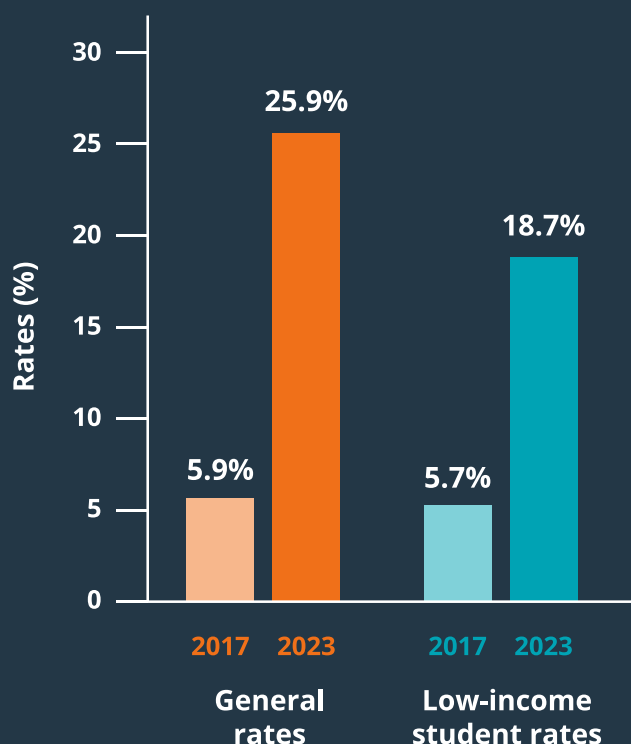
ensuring that students not only dream bigger but also have the support to reach those dreams.”

One of the most impactful strategies fueling this success is GEAR UP’s comprehensive support for high school students and first-year college enrollees. Personalized messaging guides students through essential steps such as FAFSA completion, college enrollment and class registration. The GEAR UP Scholars program extends support into the critical first year of college, offering workshops on financial literacy, time management and academic planning. This guidance helps students build the skills needed to navigate postsecondary opportunities while connecting them to mentorship and peer support networks that foster belonging and motivation.



Photo: By working with advanced lab technology, students develop both technical knowledge and confidence to pursue in-demand careers.

Postsecondary Completion Increases Across the APPC2C Region



“The beauty of a place-based partnership is that you’re building with the community. When you do it right, the people think they did it themselves, and that’s when it lasts.”

Dr. Melissa Newman

Executive Director of the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership

tangible for students. By aligning curriculum, advising and local opportunities, they create clear links between education and future prospects, fostering greater student engagement and motivation. Disaggregated local data helps communities identify specific barriers, such as gaps in access to advanced coursework or academic supports and develop targeted interventions. This tailored approach improves outcomes while deepening pride and investment among families, educators and community partners.

As Dr. Melissa Newman explains, “The beauty of a place-based partnership is that you’re building with the community. When you do it right, the people think they did it themselves, and that’s when it lasts.” Through this model, rural Appalachia demonstrates how sustained collaboration and grassroots leadership can create effective postsecondary pathways.

StriveTogether’s support has been foundational to APPC2C’s progress. The StriveTogether Theory of Action™ has provided structure for continuous improvement, data use and accountability across K-12, higher education, business and community partners. StriveTogether has strengthened the partnership’s policy advocacy capacity, helping secure \$500,000 in the Kentucky state budget to advance cradle-to-career work. It has also connected Appalachian efforts to national best practices through peer learning and alignment across local partnerships and elevated the visibility of APPC2C’s work by lifting up leadership voices, including Dr. Newman’s, as part of the national cradle-to-career movement.

The Power of Place-Based Partnerships

The results are clear: across the region, postsecondary completion rates have climbed from 5.9% in 2017 to 25.9% in 2023. Among low-income students, completion rates increased from 5.7% to 18.7% during the same period. These gains underscore the power of aligned leadership, strategic partnerships and place-based approaches in preparing rural students for lasting success in college, career and community life.

APPC2C shows that place-based partnerships, when anchored in data-driven decision-making and community ownership, can produce measurable, lasting results. Leaders who intentionally connect K-12 learning with postsecondary pathways make college and careers



Photo: Science Olympiad competitions push students to collaborate, problem-solve and build the technical know-how needed for higher education and the workforce.

Being part of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network also links local leaders to a national community of peers — executive directors and practitioners who share ideas, test strategies and provide validation for work that can often feel complex and nonlinear. Genia Isaacs, executive director of the Thompson Scholars Foundation, reflected on what this means to her work. “Overall, just being part of this national movement and national momentum, where there’s going to be 4 million young lives changed and Thompson Scholars in rural Appalachia is going to be part of that challenge.”

In rural communities, place-based partnerships bring together schools, postsecondary institutions, employers and community organizations to create an ecosystem of opportunity that supports high-quality pathways from high school to college, credentials and careers. In Barbourville, early STEM engagement builds interest and confidence in technical fields, which is then reinforced through dual-credit courses with Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College, targeted advising from Hazard Community and Technical College and workforce certifications aligned to regional demand. Learn and Earn internships extend these pathways into the workplace, giving students hands-

on experience, professional skills and meaningful connections to local employers. Together, these efforts ensure that young people can navigate clear, supported pathways toward economic mobility, expanding opportunity while strengthening the communities they call home.

Lessons Learned

Through local leadership, cross-sector collaboration and a sustained focus on cradle-to-career pathways, APPC2C shows that rural communities can lead in building the postsecondary futures their young people deserve. The partnership has learned that systemic change moves at the speed of trust. Building authentic relationships has proven just as important as launching new programs. Convening superintendents, college presidents and business leaders together has helped break down silos that often keep sectors from working in concert. By co-designing strategies across these leaders, the region has developed stronger, more durable approaches that reflect both educational and economic priorities.

Another lesson has been the importance of aligning around policies that address structural barriers. For example, House Bill 723 (2024) created a nonprofit matching fund that opens access to resources many small rural organizations would not otherwise have. By organizing around this kind of policy solution, APPC2C has strengthened its nonprofit partners and expanded opportunity in the regional funding landscape. This approach has already yielded tangible results, including \$500,000 secured in the Kentucky state budget for Partners for Rural Impact and a grant-matching pool that will benefit more than 250 nonprofits across the region.

The team has also recognized that place-based solutions must respond to local strengths. Outdoor recreation, conservation and health care are all emerging strengths in the region. By leaning into these sectors, the partnership is broadening the set of opportunities available to young people and families



Photo: Through the Learn and Earn internship program, students gain hands-on experience at local worksites, building both technical and professional skills.

while also ensuring that strategies reflect the economic realities of place. This approach moves beyond simply replacing lost industries and instead invests in a diversified, resilient future.

At the same time, APPC2C has seen how early and hands-on exposure to STEM and other postsecondary-aligned programs can change student trajectories. Robotics competitions, drone piloting certifications and project-based STEM courses have helped students picture themselves in high-demand careers before they leave high school. These experiences connect classroom learning to real-world applications, build problem-solving skills and confidence, and motivate students to pursue rigorous coursework. By embedding these opportunities into the school environment, APPC2C has positioned college, technical training and skilled careers as both relevant and attainable, shifting community expectations about what is possible for young people.

Leadership has played a pivotal role in these lessons. Principals, teachers and community coordinators who intentionally connect K-12 experiences with postsecondary pathways lay the foundation for lasting

success. Barbourville's work, for example, illustrates how early investment in STEM, access to real-world technical tools and clear bridges to college and career can shift student and family mindsets. These leaders have shown that when schools, families and local organizations collaborate, solutions become culturally relevant, sustainable and truly responsive to community needs.

Looking Ahead

APPC2C has clearly defined goals around postsecondary pathways, including high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and completion and employment. A central "North Star" goal is that every youth should have a paid work experience before leaving high school or their first year of college, ensuring stronger transitions into meaningful careers. This commitment is embedded in APPC2C's partnerships with K-12, postsecondary education and the business community and reinforced by the alignment of 16 school districts and all Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) colleges in the region to cradle-to-career outcomes.

Together, these goals are shaping what comes next. APPC2C is scaling its paid work experience program so that more students can gain practical skills and career exposure. This initiative will provide youth in all 54 Appalachian Kentucky counties with work-based learning opportunities, ensuring access to real-world experience regardless of geography. The partnership is also deepening nonprofit capacity through a grants consortium designed to strengthen rural organizations over the long term. And it is sustaining cross-sector collaboration at both local and state levels, ensuring that policy, resources and data remain aligned in service of better outcomes. Guided by the StriveTogether Theory of Action™, APPC2C continues to build the civic infrastructure needed for systems transformation, demonstrating how rural communities can reimagine opportunity from cradle to career.

New and evolving pathways demonstrate this momentum. In collaboration with three KCTCS colleges, APPC2C has co-developed workforce-aligned curricula, including outdoor recreation and conservation programs connected to Boone's Ridge, a multi-million-dollar tourism and workforce development project in Bell County. Additional pathways in news and information, civic engagement and grant writing credentialing are underway, with future plans to add private fundraising training programs at community colleges. A higher education fellowship model is also being designed to better coordinate dual-credit opportunities across the region, giving students more streamlined pathways toward postsecondary completion.

Having reached StriveTogether's highest designation in 2023, APPC2C is now focused on sustaining and deepening its impact. Data and continuous improvement remain central — serving as both the compass and the roadmap for adapting strategies,

measuring progress and addressing opportunity gaps. Robust analytics track key performance indicators and guide targeted interventions, while ongoing professional development equips partners to translate insights into action quickly. This evidence-driven approach ensures programming remains relevant to the needs of rural youth.

Nationally recognized as a model for rural cradle-to-career systems, APPC2C continues to mentor other partnerships across the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network. Hosting learning exchanges, sharing best practices and providing technical assistance accelerates the spread of effective strategies nationwide. By combining rigorous data use, strong community engagement and place-based strategies, APPC2C offers a scalable blueprint for educational and economic advancement, proving that systems transformation can deliver lasting opportunity for all students.



Photo: Interactive simulations at the Challenger Learning Center immerse students in missions like building a Mars greenhouse, helping them connect classroom science to practical innovation.



Every child. Cradle to career.

StriveTogether is a national network of community partnerships that bring together neighbors, including youth and families, nonprofits, businesses, schools and more, to work toward a future where youth can thrive in their communities. Cradle to Career Network members change the way their communities work together by building connections, sharing resources and using data to put more young people on a path to economic mobility. Our work helps young people meet seven key life milestones so that they have the opportunities they need to reach their goals, and, ultimately, thrive.

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