



Every child. Cradle to career.

Cradle-to-Career Outcomes Playbook: Employment

When young people secure a quality job, one that pays a living wage, offers benefits, builds skills and provides purpose, they don't just earn a paycheck, they launch a trajectory. Upwardly mobile work accelerates skill development and earnings, supports wealth-building, stabilizes housing and health through benefits and strengthens a young person's sense of agency and identity. Over time, these gains

compound, expanding career options and supporting long-term stability and thriving for individuals, families and communities. For young people from low-income households, first-generation families and Black and Latine communities, this access is especially transformative, narrowing opportunity gaps, reducing vulnerability to economic shocks and supporting intergenerational mobility.

>>>>> What does landing a quality job mean?

A quality job is defined by the attributes that make these outcomes possible. It pays a living wage and provides benefits that support health and stability. It offers clear pathways to build skills, advance and increase earnings over time, rather than trapping workers in static roles. And it provides purpose and dignity — helping young people understand how their work matters and how it connects to a longer-term career.

When these attributes are present, the benefits extend beyond individuals. Employers gain a more skilled and stable workforce, communities see growth in productivity and tax bases and reliance on public support declines. Together, these features explain why quality jobs are not simply endpoints of education, but engines of mobility that strengthen families, communities and the broader economy.

>>>> How to use the StriveTogether Outcomes Playbook: Employment

Mathematica's Education-to-Workforce Framework is the inspiration behind the employment 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 access to quality jobs



Essential Questions for Employment

The playbook addresses 18 essential questions to guide planning, offering actionable practices, policies and indicators for tracking progress. The essential questions are grouped into five focus areas:

Successful launch into rewarding work

1. Are young people gaining access to quality jobs, characterized by strong earnings, labor market security and quality working environment?
2. Are young people earning salaries that lead to economic mobility, economic security and that allow them to build wealth?
3. Do young workers have access to ongoing career skills development (e.g., on-the-job training) to obtain new skills and meet evolving labor market demands?

High-quality postsecondary education and workforce training

4. Are students completing credentials of value that set them up for success in the workforce?
5. Are there quality pathways for young people who pursue career training that lead to employment in quality jobs?
6. Do students attend postsecondary institutions that provide adequate financial aid and that are adequately funded to offer a quality educational experience?
7. Do students have access to adequate support to enable them to succeed academically and in the workforce?

Support networks that build social capital

8. Do young people have strong, supportive relationships with colleagues, supervisors, mentors and other influential, experienced people?
9. Do young people have access to paid, relevant internships and apprenticeships?
10. Do young people have educators, supervisors and colleagues of diverse representation?

Local workforce systems

11. Are workforce intermediaries working to bring together partners in the workforce system to develop and coordinate workforce strategies, policies and provide funding and capacity to support a cohesive, aligned workforce system?
12. Are local workforce systems coordinating with regional education and training partners (e.g., education providers, training providers, community-based organizations) to help young people acquire career skills and credentials, find apprenticeships, jobs and access supportive services?
13. Are local workforce systems engaging employers and industry groups to address local talent needs (e.g., hiring and training workers, helping develop and deliver career and technical education, providing resources for workforce development activities)?
14. Are employers creating the conditions for employee success and career advancement, improving job access and job quality?

Experiences and neighborhood conditions

15. Do K-12 systems make sufficient contributions to ensuring students are college and career ready?
16. Do young people live in well-resourced neighborhoods?
17. Do young people have access to public support (e.g., health care access, nutrition programs, economic support, etc.)?
18. Do young people live in communities with local governments that are attentive to the needs of all community members and with residents who are engaged in collective decision making?