



The State Opportunity Index measures state progress in five priority areas: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. While all states have room for improvement, those designated as Leading are at the forefront and have made the most progress toward creating equitable pathways to opportunity. Advanced states also have made substantial progress, while Developing states are earlier in their improvement efforts. Foundational states are at the beginning of their journey.

The five priority areas below all represent ways for states to strengthen the link between education and opportunity. One measure of the current strength of that link is how consistently college graduates achieve a positive return on investment (ROI), i.e., the percentage of graduates better off financially because they went to college. The positive ROI value for each state represents the estimated percentage of college graduates whose earnings premium over high school graduates is enough to repay their total cost of a degree within 10 years. Positive ROI data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Positive ROI

66%
OVERALL

68% BACHELOR'S
61% ASSOCIATE

Clear Outcomes

ADVANCED

STATE OVERALL

Everyone should have access to accurate information on employment outcomes that can help them make informed decisions about education after high school. To measure state progress, we have identified 10 critical elements that contribute to the capacity of state education-to-employment data systems to strengthen the connection between education and opportunity. Clear Outcomes data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

- LEADING** 1. Nondegree and noncredit data
- FOUNDATIONAL** 2. Enhanced wage records (e.g., occupation)
- ADVANCED** 3. Longitudinal data from postsecondary education
- FOUNDATIONAL** 4. Longitudinal data from high school
- LEADING** 5. Data sharing across state lines
- FOUNDATIONAL** 6. Open data files
- LEADING** 7. Interactive resources
- LEADING** 8. Researcher access
- DEVELOPING** 9. Learning and employment records
- ADVANCED** 10. Dedicated insights capacity

CATEGORY KEY

Overall score is the average of the 10 elements.

- **Leading:** Completely present
- **Advanced:** Partially present
- **Developing:** In development
- **Foundational:** Not in development

Quality Coaching

FOUNDATIONAL

NATIONAL OVERALL

Everyone should have access to coaching that helps them reflect on their talents and interests, choose a career goal, map pathways through education, and navigate challenges. To measure progress, we surveyed recent graduates to learn who experienced education-to-career coaching with accompanying information about employment outcomes information and support in achieving their goals. Quality Coaching data are available nationally for public two- and four-year institutions and for public four-year institutions in California, Florida, New York, and Texas.

- FOUNDATIONAL** 1. National bachelor's
- FOUNDATIONAL** 2. National associate

CATEGORY KEY

Percentage of graduates who receive timely information, guidance, and support on education-to-career pathways.

- **Leading:** 76-100%
- **Advanced:** 51-75%
- **Developing:** 26-50%
- **Foundational:** 0-25%

Affordability

DEVELOPING

STATE OVERALL

Quality post-high school programs should be within everyone's financial reach, allowing for equitable opportunities for success. To measure progress, we calculated how many hours a week a student would need to work to cover the in-state net price [total cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships]. Affordability data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

DEVELOPING

State bachelor's

ADVANCED

State associate

CATEGORY KEY

Hours of work per week during school year needed to pay net price of education (net price of education equates to the cost of attendance minus grants and scholarships) in addition to full-time summer work.

- **Leading:** Less than 10 hrs.
- **Advanced:** 10-20 hrs.
- **Developing:** 20-30 hrs.
- **Foundational:** More than 30 hrs.

Work-Based Learning

DEVELOPING

NATIONAL OVERALL

All students should have access to quality work-based learning experiences, such as paid internships and apprenticeships, that help connect their education and career aspirations. To measure progress toward broadening access to paid internships, we surveyed recent college graduates. Work-Based Learning data are available nationally for public two- and four-year institutions and for public four-year institutions in California, Florida, New York, and Texas.

DEVELOPING

National bachelor's

FOUNDATIONAL

National associate

CATEGORY KEY

Percentage of graduates who have participated in a paid internship.

- **Leading:** 61-100%
- **Advanced:** 41-60%
- **Developing:** 21-40%
- **Foundational:** 0-20%

Employer Alignment

ADVANCED

STATE OVERALL

Students should have access to programs that lead to quality jobs and mobility, and employers should assess and advance individuals based on skills and experiences, not just degrees. To measure progress, we calculated a supply/demand ratio for a variety of high-demand, high-wage jobs in each state, as well as estimated the percentage of terminal bachelor's degree holders aged 26-30 employed in a college-level job. Employer Alignment data are available for 50 states and Washington, D.C.

DEVELOPING

College-level employment

LEADING

Overall supply/demand ratio

FOUNDATIONAL

1. Data analytics

DEVELOPING

2. Engineers

LEADING

3. Finance and accounting professionals

FOUNDATIONAL

4. Finance and accounting support

LEADING

5. Health care technicians and technologists

ADVANCED

6. Information and cybersecurity

LEADING

7. Nursing

LEADING

8. Software development and engineering

LEADING

9. Technicians and technologists

CATEGORY KEY

Overall score based on average of the College-Level Employment Rate and Overall Supply/Demand Ratio.

- **Leading:** 76-100%
- **Advanced:** 61-75%
- **Developing:** 50-60%
- **Foundational:** 0-49%

ABOUT STRADA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

We collaborate with learners, educators, employers, and policymakers across the U.S. to bring to life a postsecondary education and training ecosystem that provides equitable pathways to opportunity.



Learn more at StradaEducation.org/OpportunityIndex