

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 on the rise. According to a Pew Research Center Study, in 2013 U.S. income inequality reached its highest levels since 1928. While some income inequality can be expected in a capitalist society, Standard & Poor's warn that the increasing income inequality is dampening U.S. economic growth. More troubling are the increasing disparities between whites and blacks. Take the difference in median household income between white families and black families, which Pew found has grown from about \$19,000 in 1967 to roughly \$27,000 in 2011 (as measured in 2012 dollars).

Complicating the matter is a stark disconnect between the needs of employees and the capacities of Americans looking for work. In 2014, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 11 million Americans faced unemployment

while nearly four million jobs remained unfilled. This conundrum is commonly referred to as the "skills gap," or more broadly, the gap that exists when an organization is unable to fill jobs with employees who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities. To address the challenges presented by income inequality, we need to better equip U.S. residents with the education and skills needed to access quality jobs and partake in their local economy.

This paper outlines the work of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network and Living Cities to provide 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. To do so, this paper offers a recommendation from the Prepare Learning Circle regarding measures of an employment outcome.

The Prepare Learning Circle

For many years, StriveTogether and Living Cities have partnered to help communities 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, or outcomes, from Pre-K readiness to post-secondary completion (see p. 4).

To fully realize the cradle to career vision, StriveTogether recognized the need to further frame and develop the career-end of the cradle to career continuum. To this end, StriveTogether and Living Cities launched the Prepare Learning Circle in October 2014, a pilot collective impact initiative to support communities in driving collaboration around workforce development and employment outcomes in U.S. cities.

The Prepare Learning Circle'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 ensure students and adults are ready and able to access quality jobs.

Five partnerships from the StriveTogether 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 (in collaboration with Partners for a Competitive Workforce) in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

Over the last year, the five communities of the Prepare Learning Circle worked to develop strategies that show measureable progress on improved employment outcomes within their communities. These strategies incorporate private sector, public sector, and community engagement, in addition to a focus on racial equity. Ultimately, the five communities were asked to come to a consensus and make a recommendation for an employment outcome as the StriveTogether Network's seventh outcome on the cradle to career continuum (see p.4). If the pilot proves successful, the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network will adopt the Prepare Learning Circle's recommendation.

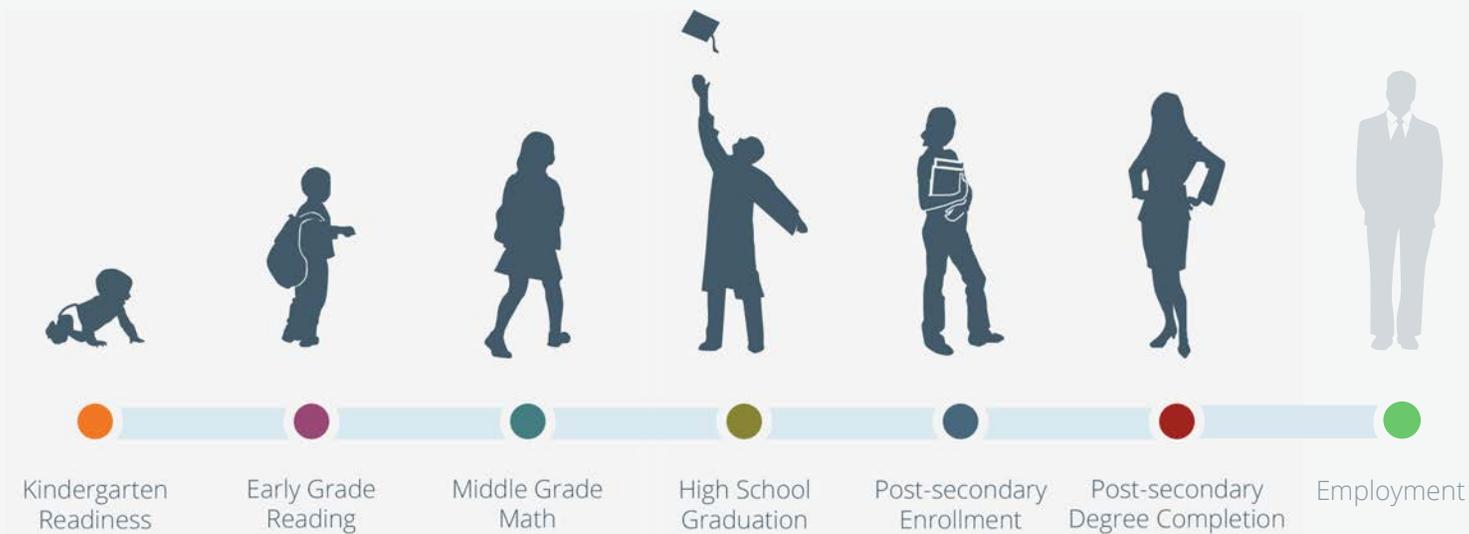
The Recommendation

Now a year into its work, the Prepare Learning Circle has developed a working draft for the employment outcome.



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- **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 Outcome

The Prepare Learning Circle recommends that the StriveTogether Network adopt the following employment outcome:

That a post-secondary graduate will be employed on a path to self-sufficiency, where self-sufficiency is defined as an individual's ability to make an income on which they can support themselves.

The Prepare Learning Circle agreed that the outcome recommendation should 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 current recommendation is also based on the Prepare Learning Circle's collective assumption that while a student may not be fully self-sufficient immediately following the completion of their post-secondary program, that having the credentials, certification, or degree would provide enough preparation to ensure their path to self-sufficiency.

Tracking and Measurement

Once the Prepare Learning Circle defined their recommendation for the employment outcome, the group set out to identify 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 job availability in high-demand industries, the efficiency of tracking the number of students graduating from specific majors, and whether internship experiences could be accurately quantified. The group recognized 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.

The Prepare Learning Circle realized that their recommendation had to be broad enough so that partnerships from across the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network could clearly see how their communities' strategies aligned with this overarching measure. Thus, the Prepare Learning Circle recommends measuring the number, or percent, of post-secondary graduates employed one year after graduation as the core indicator.

The group recognizes that the recommended core indicator may not be a perfect measure, noting that many states do not have longitudinal data systems that connect educational attainment and workforce participation data. However, many states are adopting these systems – often called P20/Workforce systems. Partnerships in the Prepare Learning Circle that do not currently have access to these data systems are

working to obtain the data through alternate methods. Such methods include engaging post-secondary institutions and triangulating census data with the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Department of Labor data.

Acknowledging the varied strategies of each partnership, the Prepare Learning Circle has made a list of recommended metrics that measure key drivers of success toward improving the outcome and contributing indicators. The group recommends tracking contributing indicators including: the percentage of graduates employed in high-demand sectors, the unemployment rate for graduates, and the percentage of students who have had either an internship or a career-shadow experience before graduation.

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 from communities in the Prepare Learning Circle represent a limited sample, StriveTogether is working to recruit other Network partnerships who are interested in the employment outcome to track the recommendation and develop strategies for moving it forward. These communities' ability to make progress toward improving the outcome will help to strengthen and further vet the Prepare Learning Circle's recommendation.

If you are a member of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network and are interested in working to help vet the employment outcome before the 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.



Strive Together

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