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Southern  
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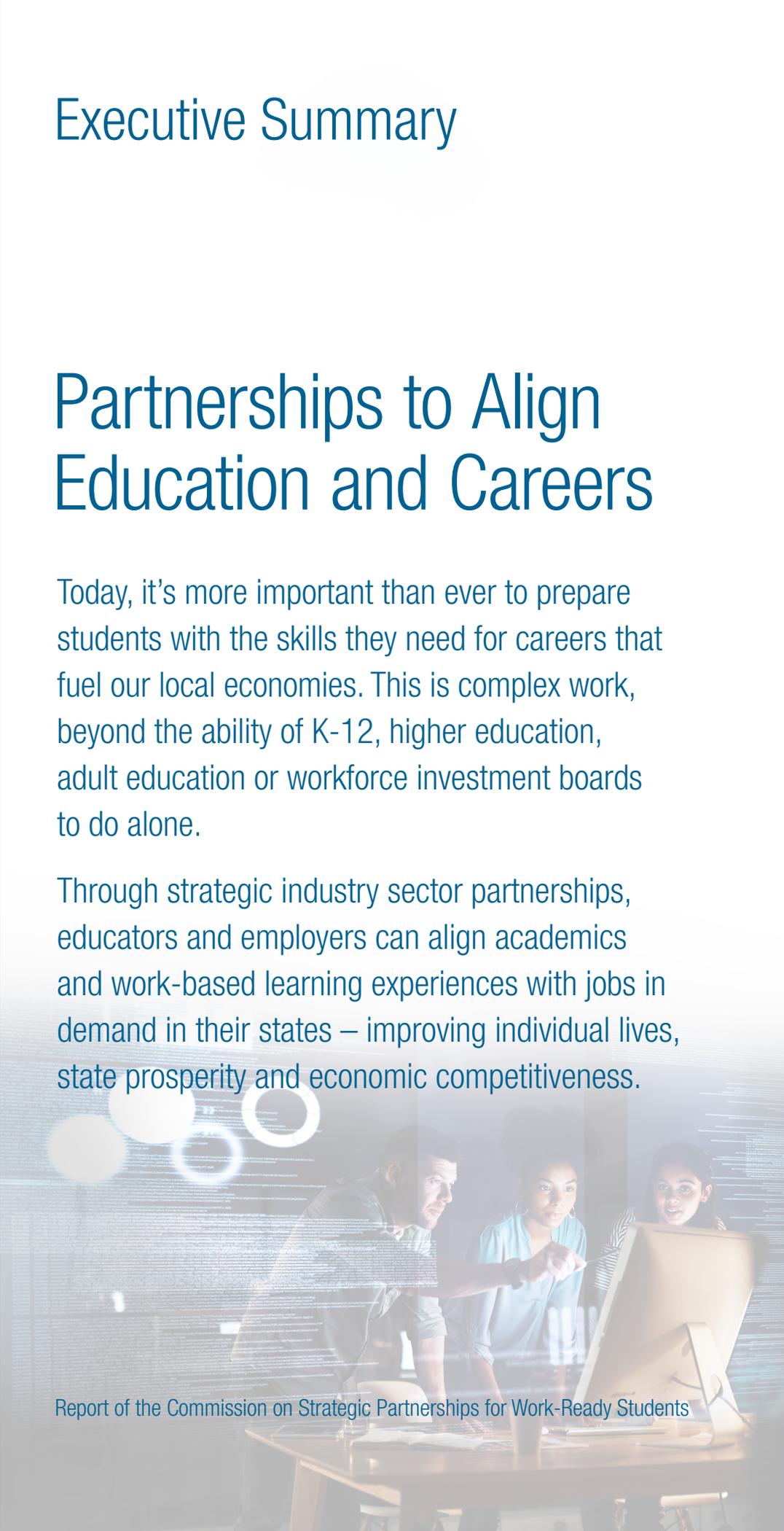
[SREB.org](http://SREB.org)

## Executive Summary

# Partnerships to Align Education and Careers

Today, it's more important than ever to prepare students with the skills they need for careers that fuel our local economies. This is complex work, beyond the ability of K-12, higher education, adult education or workforce investment boards to do alone.

Through strategic industry sector partnerships, educators and employers can align academics and work-based learning experiences with jobs in demand in their states – improving individual lives, state prosperity and economic competitiveness.

A background image showing three students (two women and one man) sitting at a desk, looking at a computer monitor. The image is semi-transparent and overlaid with a grid of glowing circles and lines, suggesting a digital or educational theme.

Report of the Commission on Strategic Partnerships for Work-Ready Students

# Executive Summary

## The Commission on Strategic Partnerships for Work-Ready Students

The SREB Commission on Strategic Partnerships for Work-Ready Students met in 2018 and 2019 to explore promising practices for learning experiences that prepare students for the world of work. The commission's recommendations call for systemic change through education-industry partnerships and career pathway programs. Each state will need committed leadership to bring together stakeholders and agree on how to implement these recommendations.

## Recommendations of the Commission

### 1. Engage business and industry leaders in forging and strengthening regional industry sector partnerships in support of career education.

Robust **industry sector partnerships**, highlighted as a strategy in the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, should be supported and strengthened. These partnerships will be indispensable in aligning the education system with current and future needs and in identifying credentials of value.

**industry sector partnerships** bring together employers in related businesses and industries requiring similar skill sets in their workforces.

### 2. Prioritize state resources and efforts to develop career pathways in critical industry sectors as identified by regional business partnerships.

With finite resources at hand, states should carefully direct career and technical education dollars, scholarships, apprenticeship incentives and other supports toward career pathways with the most value for individual earners and for the local economy.

### 3. Adopt a business-friendly statewide policy for K-16 and work-based learning that promotes a continuum of experiences beginning in the middle grades and extending through postsecondary.

From career awareness in middle school through registered apprenticeship programs in community college, work-based learning should be a valued and integral part of the curriculum available to all students. Coherent and comprehensive statewide policies should support and provide substance to this vision.

### 4. Recognize the importance of work-based learning in high school by including those experiences in graduation requirements and school accountability ratings.

Work-based learning will only be taken seriously when rewards value both college and careers.

### 5. Provide policy solutions for workers' compensation and liability insurance for work-based learning placements.

One of the major barriers to work-based learning opportunities for secondary students is concern over liability in the event of a student being injured. States have been addressing this through legislation that allows districts to cover students under their workers' compensation policies, and in some cases by using third-party staffing agencies to handle student placements.

### 6. Support industry sector partnerships with **braided funding** from multiple sources — federal, state, local, private and philanthropic.

**braided funding** draws from multiple sources but tracks funds to individual recipients.

Industry sector partnerships can be supported through local funds, state funds and a variety of federal programs. Major federal funding sources include Perkins and vocational rehabilitation and adult education program funds from the U.S. Department of Education, and workforce investment, H1-B, and displaced worker funds from the U.S. Department of Labor. The private sector may also be willing to invest in partnerships that meet industry needs.

**7. Provide incentives for employers that offer paid work-based learning experiences.**

Half of the SREB states provide financial incentives to employers who offer such experiences. Most of these incentives are provided through tax credits.

**8. Develop the capacity of teachers, school counselors, school leaders and other educators to support students in all stages of career readiness, from career awareness to apprenticeships.**

Schools and districts need high-quality professional learning to build capacity among educators to meet career readiness goals. Teacher externships in industry are an important way to make curriculum and instruction more relevant. Counselors also need professional learning and resources to support career advisement.

**9. Promote Simulated Workplace and other virtual solutions to expand work-based learning opportunities in rural and hard-to-serve communities.**

Where students cannot go to work-based learning, bring the work-based learning to them. The Simulated Workplace initiative gives secondary students the experience and skills to succeed in the workplace.

**10. Designate a state agency or special council to work with employers and secondary and postsecondary education agencies to identify, evaluate and approve industry certification examinations, technical skills assessments, dual credit courses and end-of-course assessments that are part of a system of [stackable credentials](#).**

[stackable credentials](#) are progressive and sequential postsecondary awards, such as degrees or licenses, demonstrating competency to progress along a career pathway.

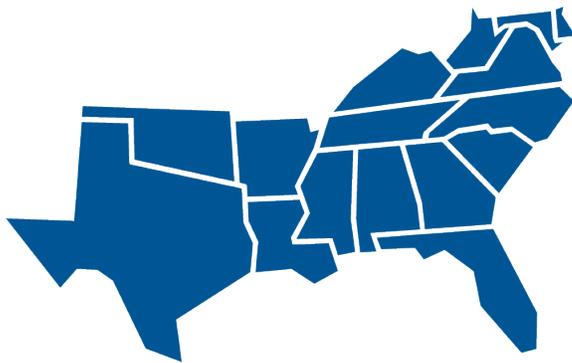
Governor's-cabinet coordination of workforce development strategies is necessary to bring coherence to the many disparate agencies and programs involved in workforce development. This provides high-level direction to the development of career pathways within the state, including the identification of credentials of value.

**11. Promote structured dual enrollment programs for career pathways and establish uniform statewide policies so students can earn credits toward high school graduation that are automatically added to students' transcripts at postsecondary institutions.**

Dual enrollment programs offer high school students an opportunity to jump-start their work toward a degree and career and can reduce the burden of student debt. Dual enrollment should be integrated into overall workforce development strategies as a cost-effective way to help students graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

## A vision possible through partnership

Individuals prepared for a lifetime of success, and a workforce ready to compete in a global economy: This is a vision possible only through partnership. The commission encourages each state to fully engage education, business and industry partners to address these common concerns.



The Southern Regional Education Board helps states improve public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D. A nonprofit, nonpartisan interstate compact, SREB was created in 1948 by governors and legislators who recognized the link between education and economic vitality.