

# STATELINE MIDWEST



MIDWEST

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS | MIDWESTERN OFFICE

THE MIDWESTERN OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS



**A compilation of articles that appeared in the publication *Stateline Midwest* in 2024 on policies related to education and workforce development**



MIDWEST

The Council of State Governments | Midwestern Legislative Conference

701 East 22nd Street, Suite 110 | Lombard, Illinois 60148

630.925.1922 | [csgm@csg.org](mailto:csgm@csg.org) | [www.csgmidwest.org](http://www.csgmidwest.org)



# STATELINE MIDWEST



## MIDWEST

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS | MIDWESTERN OFFICE  
VOLUME 33, ISSUE 3

## 'CAPTURE THE MOMENT'

In an era of "more jobs than people," states have put a premium on effective workforce policy, which also will be crucial to adapting to economic changes and opportunities that lie ahead

by Tim Anderson ([tanderson@csg.org](mailto:tanderson@csg.org))

Every year, \$4 billion or more flows from the federal government to states for workforce training and development.

Add to that the billions of dollars being invested over the next five years in local economies under laws such as the CHIPS and Science Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, and states are positioned to think big about workforce innovation and transformation.

But an expert panel at this summer's CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting also had a note of caution for the region's legislators: Make your state's approach to workforce policy more strategic, nimble and holistic, or you risk wasting those taxpayer dollars as well as some of the coming economic opportunities.

"In a place like Ohio, and I imagine in many of the states represented here, we're a little hungry, right?" Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said to legislators during the session. "We went through three decades of being kicked around pretty good because our manufacturing base got eroded, and generations of people moved out of our states.

"And now that we're doing 'made in America' again, we're developing supply chains again, we have the opportunity to help the people in our communities, the businesses that are there, capture this moment."

It's a time of "more people than jobs," he added, and where a skilled

workforce will top the list of factors for businesses on where they invest and locate.

Joining Husted on the expert panel were Shalin Jyotishi of New America and Jeannine LaPrad of the National Skills Coalition. Pat Tiberi, a former state legislator, U.S. congressman and now head of the Ohio Business Roundtable, moderated the discussion.

The session was held in support of the 2024 MLC Chair's Initiative of Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke: Workforce Innovation and Transformation.

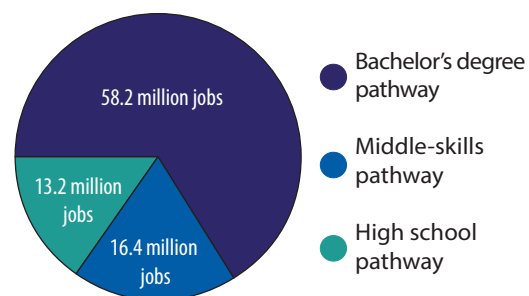
### HOW AND WHY SOME JOB TRAINING FAILS TO DELIVER

According to Jyotishi, the billions of dollars coming to states via federal laws such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act have not yielded the kind of results that policymakers should demand.

In 2022, for example, a U.S. Department of Labor study found that in the first three years after individuals completed training under federally funded career pathways programs, their wages were only 6 percent higher compared to those who did not.

Further, the average wage of program completers was about \$17,000 a year, and any positive earning effects

### PROJECTED # OF 'GOOD JOBS' IN U.S. IN 2031, BY EDUCATIONAL PATHWAY\*



\* A 'good job' is defined as one that provides a family-sustaining wage. The three pathways are based on an individual's educational attainment: high school only; some level of postsecondary work such as college credit, an associate degree, a license or certification (middle-skills pathway); and a bachelor's degree.

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

of the training disappeared over the medium and long term.

"That doesn't sound like a very effective outcome to me," said Jyotishi, the founder and managing director of New America's Future of Work and Innovation Economy Initiative. "Taxpayers lost, the workers lost, and, as we well know, employers still face workforce challenges."

States have the authority to steer these programs in a different direction. Avoid "low-quality training" that leads to "unemployment, under-employment or employment in poverty-wage jobs," Jyotishi said, and make sure funding lines up with your state's broader economic needs and aspirations.

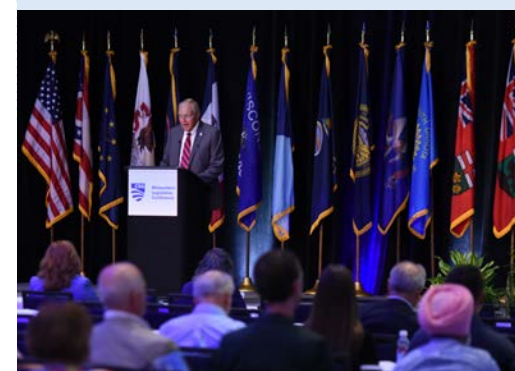
This requires more strategic thinking and planning on workforce policy, a

### SPECIAL EDITION OF STATELINE MIDWEST: MLC ANNUAL MEETING

This summer, led by Sen. Bill Reineke, the Ohio General Assembly welcomed hundreds of state and provincial legislators, their guests and others to Columbus for The Council of State Governments' Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting. This edition of *Stateline Midwest* highlights many of the sessions held and actions taken at the meeting — the premier event for legislators from this region.

The cover story for this edition is based on an expert-led keynote session held at the meeting on workforce innovation and transformation, the topic chosen by Reineke for his 2024 MLC Chair's Initiative.

CSG Midwest thanks this year's meeting hosts, participants, speakers and sponsors for contributing to the success of the 78th MLC Annual Meeting.



Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke, chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, discusses the importance of a strong, skilled workforce (what he calls the "bedrock of individual, business and community success") and introduces a keynote session on the topic in July at the MLC Annual Meeting. Workforce Innovation and Transformation is the focus of his MLC Chair's Initiative for 2024. (photo: Matt Shadle, digital media manager for the Ohio Senate)

## ON STATE WORKFORCE POLICY, BETTER ALIGNMENT IS FOUNDATION FOR GETTING BETTER RESULTS

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

role that legislatures can lead on.

"If you are looking to build your semiconductor industry, make sure your WIOA and Perkins funding is aligned to fund workforce programs in the semiconductor industry," he said.

"Trucking right now represents more of WIOA funds than the next nine categories of occupations. Trucking has a 90 percent turnover rate. Some of the jobs pay well, but it tends to be a very grueling occupation. And I haven't seen a lot of legislators that want to grow the trucking industry as a strategic economic development priority."

**'IT HAS TO BE LOCALIZED'**

Husted, who leads the Ohio Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, cautioned about relying too heavily on federal workforce policy or funding ("it's too slow and bureaucratic" to be a centerpiece of your strategy, he said) or trying to "central plan" at the state level.

"It has to be localized," Husted said. "You can have goals, you can fund it, you can have expectations. But allow latitude for local delivery."

Within every state, Husted noted, there are many distinct economic regions — in Ohio, for example, a strategy for Cincinnati might not be suited for Columbus, Akron, Dayton or rural areas.

"You have to have a private-public partnership where you understand the unique needs of the region that you're in," Husted said. "Your public institutions — your high schools, your career centers, your community colleges, your universities — need to be aligned with what's happening there."

This collaboration might only occur, though, with a nudge or incentives from the state.

"You get the educator sitting there at the table, you get the private sector sitting there, and you get them to agree on what they need," Husted said. "And then you finance it."

Ohio does this in part through its Industry Sector Partnerships initiative. Led by the business community, and including involvement by education and training providers, these partnerships develop and implement a workforce strategy, either for a single sector or multiple sectors, but always for a single region within the state.

Another policy trend has been to nurture more sector-based strategies.

In Michigan, for example, the state prioritizes select industry sectors (agriculture, health care, energy and information technology are among them) and brings together multiple employers from a single sector to determine its talent needs and challenges. Next, they work with local educators and others to develop a "demand-driven workforce system."



"When I think of state policy as a lever to better align industry and academia and economic development ... there's no strategy that I think of as more important than sectoral strategies," Jyotishi said.

**MORE THAN TRAINING: WORKERS NEED 'HOLISTIC SUPPORTS'**

This recent era of "more jobs than people" is captured in data tracked by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: the number of unemployed persons per job opening.

Nationwide, the ratio was 0.8 as of June 2024, compared to 1.9 in 2014 and 2.1 in 2004. (Over the past two years, the number of unemployed persons per job opening has increased some, from a low of 0.5 in parts of 2022 to the July 2024 ratio of 0.8.)

In the Midwest, these ratios are even lower than the U.S. average in North Dakota and South Dakota (0.4), Minnesota (0.5), Nebraska and Wisconsin (0.6), and Iowa and Kansas (0.7).

In part because of this tight labor market, more attention is being paid to the barriers that stand in the way of people participating in job training, earning a postsecondary credential or degree, and entering and staying in the workforce.

"Many folks need access to holistic supports and services," said LaPrad, managing director of policy and research at the National Skills Coalition.

Addressing concerns about the costs of child care, for instance, has become more central to state workforce strategies, with LaPrad singling out Iowa and Michigan as examples.

In Iowa, state incentives are now available to businesses that offer child care as part of their benefits packages for workers, and in Michigan, an innovative "tri-share" model shares the costs of child care equally among the employer, the employee and the state.

"We're going to see a need to focus not only on child care, but elder care and other family-care issues are also becoming fundamental for many workers," LaPrad added.

**APPRENTICESHIPS IN REACH FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

Husted has been working on workforce policy for several decades, including periods marked by "more people than jobs."

Today, he said, business leaders are eager to be part of building a skilled workforce, which requires partnerships

with state education systems, both K-12 and postsecondary.

At the K-12 level, Husted noted, every school district in Ohio must now have a business advisory council, a convening of local education and business leaders to foster work-based learning opportunities centered on the area's economic drivers.

The state also is placing a greater emphasis on career and technical education, as reflected in a renamed and reorganized state Department of Education and Workforce (SB 1 of 2023) and a two-year state budget that included \$267.7 million in grants to expand the capacity of CTE programs.

At one Ohio career center, Husted noted during the session, 96 percent of graduates had job offers and, as a class, had earned \$2.5 million while still in school thanks to apprenticeships at local businesses.

"They were leaving as electricians, robotics maintenance technicians and nurses, and with a variety of different skills," Husted said.

His goal is that all Ohio high school students graduate with a "skill that is hireable and desired in the economy, because from there, they can either go directly to work or go to work somewhere where the employer will pay for their college degree."

According to Jyotishi, youth apprenticeships are a promising model for states, particularly those that offer students the chance not only to "earn and learn" in high school, but also accrue college credits prior to graduation. He pointed to Career Launch in Chicago and Kalamazoo, Mich., and the Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP) initiative in Minneapolis as exemplary programs.

Wisconsin has the oldest and largest youth apprenticeship program in the nation, the Urban Institute noted in a 2023 study, and the Legislature has since increased state support for it, up to a total of \$19 million in the current two-year budget (compared to \$12 million in the last biennium.).

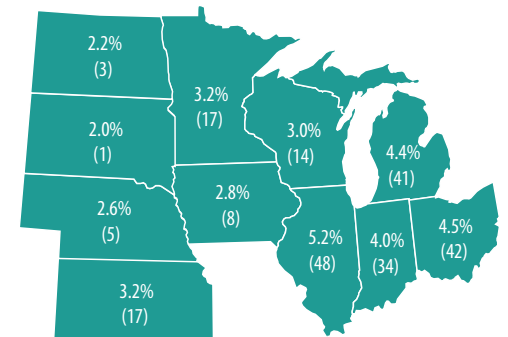
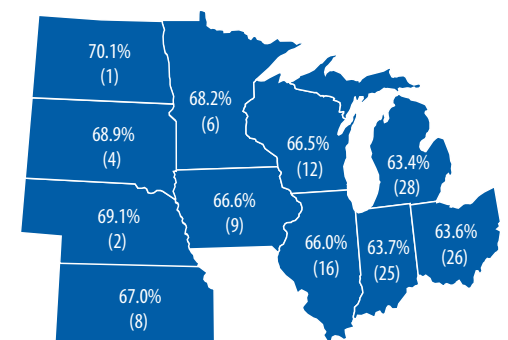
Local coalitions of school districts, labor organizations and industry groups run each of Wisconsin's youth apprenticeships, which focus on training and learning in a "career cluster" identified by the Legislature in statute.

**OUTCOME-BASED FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

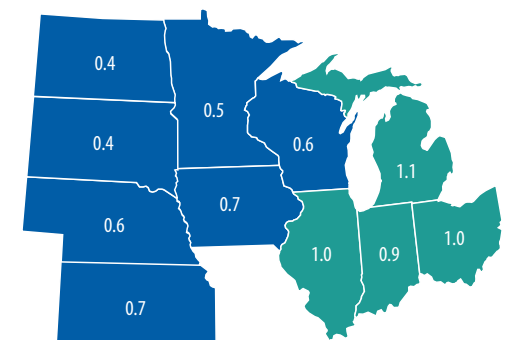
At the postsecondary level, LaPrad said, a handful of states are moving toward performance-based funding for community colleges.

She noted a new law in Texas as an example. Under HB 8 of 2023, student outcomes will determine funding levels. One of the metrics that will be used: the number of college students who earned a "credential of value," with extra weight given to credentials tied to a high-demand occupation. Additionally, to have "value," the credential must be tied to eventual future higher earnings for the student.

"Refinancing should be foundational to how we think about public institutions, especially two-year institutions, being

**THE STATE OF THE MIDWEST'S LABOR MARKET****Unemployment rate, July 2024**  
**(U.S. rank in parentheses)****Labor force participation rate, July 2024\***  
**(U.S. rank in parentheses)**

\*The labor participation rate is the percentage of people in the civilian noninstitutional population either working or looking for work.

**# of unemployed persons per job opening, June 2024**

● Ratio lower than U.S. ratio (0.8)      ● Ratio higher than U.S. ratio (0.8)

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (top and bottom maps) and Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (middle map)

able to be more nimble," LaPrad said, noting how the incentive structure rewards colleges that adapt to evolving workforce needs.

The panel also explored changes coming from technological advances such as the rise of artificial intelligence, which they said, at first, is likely to augment rather than replace jobs.

In Ohio, Husted said, the state's TechCred program now offers reimbursements to employers for the costs associated with a worker earning an industry-recognized, technology-focused credential. The reimbursement is up to \$2,000 per credential. As of May 2024, more than 100,000 credentials had been awarded, and AI-based credentials are making up a larger and larger number of requests, Husted said.

Jyotishi suggested public investments in programs that embed industry certifications into postsecondary programs that also lead to degrees.

"Degree programs are still going to be important if you want the tech jobs and if you want this region to become the Tech Belt, not the Rust Belt," he said.

Workforce Innovation and Transformation is the CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference Chair's Initiative of Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke.



Pictured from left to right: Pat Tiberi, president and CEO of the Ohio Business Roundtable, moderates a discussion on the future of state workforce policy with Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, Shalin Jyotishi of New America and Jeannine LaPrad of the National Skills Coalition. (photo: Matt Shadle, digital media manager for the Ohio Senate)

# STATELINE MIDWEST



## MIDWEST

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS | MIDWESTERN OFFICE  
VOLUME 33 | ISSUE 4 | 2024

## NEW LAWS REFLECT STATES' MOVE TO CONSOLIDATE EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

Goal is to end fragmented system, better integrate programs that serve families and providers

by Derek Cantù ([dcantu@csge.org](mailto:dcantu@csge.org))

For years, a common target of government reform advocates has been “siloeing,” when a lack of inter-agency planning and communication results in redundancies and inefficiencies, as well as frustration among citizens.

A case in point: an often-fractured approach to delivering and overseeing the services that the families of young children need.

“Right now, if a day care center wants to set up shop, it must work with one state agency to get licensed, another to receive workforce support, and a third to get funding,” Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly said in her State of the State address at the start of the year.

“There are too many barriers, too many portals, too much hassle. We need to fix it.”

Other policy leaders have observed similar governance problems in their

states, at a time when they are looking to expand the capacity and quality of early-childhood care and learning opportunities — a policy goal that has been identified as crucial to addressing everything from workforce shortages to young people’s readiness for K-12 success.

“Families are not getting the services that they need because they are not sure where to go to or what they’re entitled to,” says Illinois Rep. Joyce Mason, chair of the House Child Care Accessibility & Early Childhood Education Committee.

In her state, and across much of the region, a push is under way to end the siloeing and create a governance model that works better for families, early-childhood providers and other stakeholders.

The result has been a mix of executive actions by governors, legislative proposals and laws, many of which are creating new stand-

alone state agencies that consolidate programming and regulatory oversight of early-childhood education.

### STATES CREATING NEW STAND-ALONE AGENCIES

Last year, Minnesota legislators (as part of a larger effort to break up certain divisions within the Department of Human Services) created the Department of Children, Youth and Families (SF 2995).

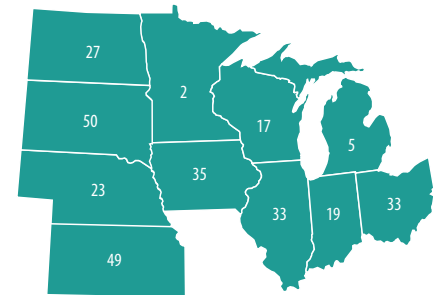
According to *The Minnesota Star Tribune*, in addition to gaining administrative authority over child care licensing and certain early-childhood education programs, the department will oversee foster care and adoption programs and the juvenile justice system.

More broadly, it will improve the coordination of services while “elevating children and families in policy and budget decisions,” according to a March 2024 report from Minnesota Management and Budget.

In Michigan, the Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential was established in July 2023 with the signing of an executive order by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

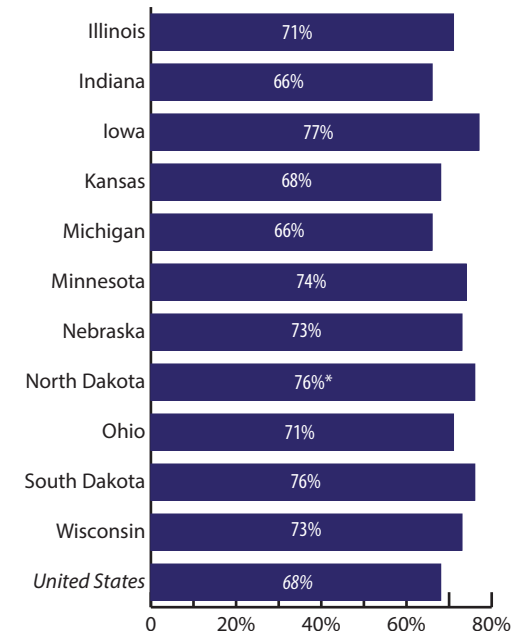
As the department’s name suggests, its work is not just limited to early childhood education and child care programming. Mobilizing and delivering education resources for all ages, from

EFFICIENCY, INTEGRATION OF STATE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS: WHERE MIDWEST STATES RANKED ON STUDY BY BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER\*



\*The study was released in January 2023. Some states, including Illinois and Ohio, finished with same scores and U.S. ranking.

### % OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 6 WITH ALL AVAILABLE PARENTS IN THE LABOR FORCE (2022)



\*The percentage in North Dakota is for the year 2019.

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center (analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data)



“Families are not getting the services that they need because they are not sure where to go or what they are entitled to.”

Illinois Rep. Joyce Mason

# NEED FOR MORE CHILD CARE, EARLY LEARNING OPTIONS IS DRIVING STATE-LEVEL REFORMS

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

preschool to postsecondary and beyond, falls under its mission.

"If we're recruiting adults to come back to school under programs like Michigan Reconnect, what are we doing at the same time about [their] children who count on them for caregiving?" says Michelle Richard, deputy director of higher education in the new department.

Having all of those services housed within a single agency, she adds, better reflects how people's lives intersect with the work of multiple state programs.

This administrative consolidation, Richard adds, should help the state as it seeks to fund universal prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds by 2027.

"When we're thinking about that planning work here [at the department], we're not thinking about, 'Our pre-K team needs to lead this work,'" Richard explains.

"Maybe that's true, but they need to be surrounded by a team that says, 'If we do this, what does that mean for child care? If we do this, how are we collaborating with Head Start? How are we using child care licensing rules to help jump-start pre-K classrooms?'"

## 'SMART START' IN ILLINOIS

Michigan's change in governance is somewhat unique compared to other states in the region.

Administrative consolidation came about in less than five months and was purely the result of an executive order. (Note: The constitutionality of this order has been questioned by some opponents, particularly as it pertains to the authority and duties of the State Board of Education.)

In contrast, advocates in Illinois and Kansas called for a two-year transition period, and the governors sought consolidation through legislative action.

And in both of these states, calls for new stand-alone agencies came as the result of findings from bipartisan task forces.

Between 2019 and 2021, a governor-established commission in Illinois focused on ideas for ensuring equitable funding and outcomes for children during the pivotal early learning years.

The commission noted in its final report that the state had a long way to go to reach these policy goals. For example, it found that kindergarten readiness varied distinctly across racial and ethnic lines.

Additionally, in 2019, "only 20 percent of low-income children and 29 percent of all Illinois children demonstrated full readiness across language/literacy, math, and social-emotional domains when they entered kindergarten."

Gov. JB Pritzker and legislators have since launched a multi-year appropriations plan known as "Smart Start." Along with more funding for home visiting programs, Smart Start grants are used to increase wages in the child care sector and to add preschool seats in Illinois communities identified as "preschool deserts."

The commission's final report also proposed the creation of a Department of Early Childhood. Pritzker embraced the idea and passed an executive order to kick-start work on the transition.

He sought legislative action as well, and SB 1 became law in June.

Rep. Mason, one of the bill's chief co-sponsors, says that in addition to helping families navigate and find the early-childhood services available to them, the new department will allow existing state agencies to prioritize their core missions.

For example, child care licensing authority is being taken away from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, an agency that has often faced bipartisan scrutiny over child safety and neglect-related deaths.

Removing this authority from DCFS will not only mean more of a focus on child well-being within that agency, Mason says, but also an opportunity for the state to modernize licensing in child care.

"If you are going to work in an early-childhood center and you are going to make, say, \$17 an hour, and now you're being told you have to wait up to two months for us to get the background check back ... that's not realistic, because the next day you could get hired at Target for the same or more money," Mason says.

## MORE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

This recent focus on governance issues in early childhood also has led to other proposals in Illinois.

Rep. Jackie Haas has been part of a working group in her caucus looking at ways to make it easier for women to become the owners of child care businesses and to fill needs in their communities.

"What we were hearing from some of our constituents [and chambers of commerce] was they didn't know how

to open up their own centers," says Haas.

"[DCFS holds] all of the orientations in field office sites, and they're all in-person, with no virtual training. We looked at how we could possibly expand where they're doing these so that it would cover more geography in the state."

These conversations led Haas to sponsor HB 4059, which was signed into law in August and requires the state to hold orientations at least twice a year, offer virtual meeting options, and make them made available in languages other than English.

Regarding SB 1 and creation of the new stand-alone agency, Haas says she is optimistic that it could lead to "some strides for improvement in early childhood education."

But she also believes policymakers should critically evaluate the eventual size of the department's workforce "before we look at completely lateral transfers."

Mason and other SB 1 supporters have made clear the intent is for no state employees to lose their jobs at the end of the transition period. For positions that are deemed redundant, Mason says, the plan will be to retrain people and perhaps rotate out some staff currently working in high-turnover divisions, such as casework.

GG Weisenfeld of the National Institute for Early Education Research says one caveat about agency consolidation is that the end result is not always a leaner

workforce or completely streamlined operations.

"People have the assumption, 'Oh, if I just consolidate programs, I can get rid of people,' and you really can't," Weisenfeld says.

"You still need people to run programs, you need people to coordinate, you need people to figure out how all these funding streams are going to blend in or braid."

## 'OVER 900 SLOTS SHORT'

Last year, Gov. Kelly created the Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force, whose work and findings led to her proposed Office of Early Childhood.

Despite Kansas being the first state in the country to create a Children's Trust Fund way back in 1980, the task force (using data from 2018 to 2020) found that 44 percent of the state's residents live in a child care desert, only 8 percent of families can afford infant care, and 38 percent of 3- to 5-year olds are not enrolled in a pre-K program.

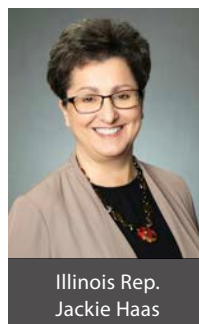
Additionally, a 2023 report from the Bipartisan Policy Center ranked Kansas 49th among states in a study assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of coordination of state early childhood systems.

Throughout the spring session, plans for this new Office of Early Childhood evolved several times before culminating in the language of SB 96. When this bill entered conference committee for

% OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN STATE PREKINDERGARTEN (2022-23)		
State	4-year-olds	3-year-olds
Illinois	34%	23%
Indiana	*	*
Iowa	67%	6%
Kansas	45%	22%
Michigan	34%	0%
Minnesota	11%	1%
Nebraska	34%	16%
North Dakota	5%	0%
Ohio	11%	2%
South Dakota	*	*
Wisconsin	63%	0.1%
United States	35%	7%

\* In Indiana and South Dakota, children were not enrolled in programs that met the National Institute for Early Education Research's definition of "state prekindergarten." The institute defines state prekindergarten as initiatives that are funded and directed by the state to support group learning experiences for preschool-age children.

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research, "The State of Preschool 2023"



Illinois Rep. Jackie Haas

## CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS USED BY U.S. WORKING MOTHERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN (SURVEYS FROM 2022 AND 2023)\*

44%	% THAT REPORTED USING A CHILD CARE FACILITY (INCLUDES CENTERS, SCHOOL-BASED CARE, PRESCHOOLS, HEAD START, ETC.)
39%	% THAT REPORTED USING CARE PROVIDED BY A RELATIVE
18%	% THAT REPORTED USING CARE PROVIDED BY A NON-RELATIVE (FRIEND, NEIGHBOR, HOME-BASED PROVIDER, ETC.)
21%	% THAT REPORTED "NONE," LIKELY MEANING PARENTS PROVIDED ALL CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN

\* From survey that asked respondents this question: "In the last seven days, did your household use any of the following individuals or arrangements to look after the children in the household?"

Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago study based on U.S. Census Bureau's "Household Pulse Survey"



Kansas Rep. Tory Marie Blew

amendments, Rep. Tory Marie Blew became one of the chief negotiators.

Like the governor, Blew believes having a one-stop shop for early-childhood education could lead to better coordination. However, that doesn't mean the Legislature and the governor's office were in complete lockstep.

For example, one sticking point was whether to provide more flexibility to child care centers on their staff-pupil ratios.

Republican lawmakers, who favor increasing ratios for certain age groups, argue it could open more slots in child care centers and thereby expand access.

"Just in my county alone, which is a rural county, we're over 900 slots short," Blew says.

Kelly, a Democrat, and others argued that increasing the number of children or infants per staffer could jeopardize safety.

The compromise: Any increases to staff-pupil ratios would need to come via administrative rulemaking, not a change in statute.

Other notable changes made in conference committee included allowing non-family members to watch children for longer periods of time, expanding the definition of "day care facility" to include youth out-of-school or "drop-in" programs, and the formation of a five-year pilot program to waive certain licensing requirements and to increase child care facility and drop-in program capacities.

SB 96 did not receive a final vote in the Senate before legislators adjourned.

The overarching idea of having a stand-alone agency for early childhood, though, remains a top priority of Kelly's. It likely will be considered again next session.



## EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

More states are requiring instruction in financial literacy for graduation; among the challenges is building up a trained teacher workforce

by Derek Cantù ([dcantu@csrg.org](mailto:dcantu@csrg.org))

In recent years, most Midwestern states have legislatively revised their respective high school graduation requirements to include mandated instruction in financial literacy.

In 2023 alone, three states (Indiana, SB 35; Minnesota, HF 2497; and Wisconsin, AB 109) enacted laws requiring one semester of financial literacy education starting with the graduating class of 2028.

The Wisconsin measure, signed by the governor in December, marked the culmination of a multi-year journey.

Back in 2017, lawmakers approved AB 280, which tasked local school boards with adopting and incorporating financial literacy curriculum standards in all K-12 grades. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in turn, developed state standards to guide this coursework.

According to the state's latest standards, students are expected to understand, for example, the nuances of money management, financial risk assessment, how to save and invest, and how to achieve debt resolution.

Sen. Joan Ballweg, a co-sponsor of both the 2017 and 2023 legislation, says that despite the availability of state standards, many Wisconsin schools were still not offering the instruction to students.

"[In 2023], 34 percent of schools guaranteed students would have one semester of personal finance before graduating, and 59 percent [of students] had the option of taking an elective personal finance education course," Ballweg says.

That wasn't nearly good enough for her and other believers in the need to build students' financial literacy.

"The stand-alone class is going to be able to incorporate more of what financial literacy is," Ballweg says.

"Everything from talking about investments, talking about amortization schedules, talking about your own budgeting, the ramifications of what it takes to pay for college, [to] buying a vehicle on your own and the insurance that's going to come with it."

Chris Caltabiano, chief program officer of the nonprofit Council for Economic Education, says research

supports the taking of a designated financial literacy course.

"With a well-prepared, well-trained teacher [it] has positive downstream effects on [students'] financial behaviors and outcomes," he says.

"Students who have had that dedicated course tend to have higher credit scores; they tend to have lower debt default rates. If they choose to go to college, they tend to make decisions that are more financially advantageous, [such as] making the decision to take out a public loan versus a private loan."

Ballweg pursued legislation in 2022 (SB 841) requiring a full academic year of financial literacy starting with the class entering high school that fall. After getting feedback that one full year could be overly burdensome for some schools, she returned with AB 109 and its semester-long requirement. The bill also extends the implementation time frame (to the class of 2028).

Questions have been raised in Wisconsin about the actual teaching of the new requirement — both in terms of finding qualified educators in the midst of a national teacher shortage and how to fund professional development training for educators.

### MORE FLEXIBILITY FOR SCHOOLS IN IOWA

Concern over finding enough teachers is one of the reasons that Iowa legislators last year modified their laws on financial literacy.

In 2018 and 2019, the Legislature adopted a series of bills making Iowa the first Midwestern state to require instruction in a stand-alone course.

SF 475 of 2018 spells out the type of instruction to be covered in this course: for example, wealth building and college planning, credit and debit, consumer awareness, insurance coverage, and the advantages and disadvantages of buying and renting real estate.

A second measure, SF 2415, allowed this financial literacy course to fulfill part of Iowa's existing graduation requirements for social studies. A third measure, SF 139 of 2019, called for the new requirement to take effect with the class of 2021.

As the 2023 legislative session began, however, constituent concerns led to the filing and eventual signing of SF 391. This measure allows personal finance literacy content to be delivered though either a dedicated unit of coursework or its integration into other courses.

"This [request for change] actually

came from the governor's office," says bill author Sen. Tim Kraayenbrink, who also sponsored SF 2415 in 2018.

"They were in contact with a lot of the smaller rural schools that were struggling not only to get teachers to teach the individual [financial] literacy courses — along with a lot of other courses — but also just the time ... to be able to do it."

Kraayenbrink stresses he is still a proponent of financial literacy education and that this change simply gives schools more flexibility.

### FINDING OUTSIDE PARTNERS, SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Public-private partnerships can help fill instructional needs for schools struggling to find teachers or training opportunities.

"Organizations like [ours] and others are out there providing professional development for educators so that they have the competency and the capability," Caltabiano says.

Ballweg notes that even before she filed AB 109, Milwaukee Public Schools was getting nearly \$500,000 from Next Gen Personal Finance to implement financial literacy instruction.

"It's not just that [Next Gen is] providing some funding for the schools to put this in their curriculum, but they're also supporting the educators that are going to be doing the curriculum," she says.

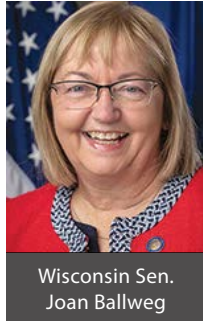
To some lawmakers, though, the real challenge is securing permanent funding.

"I used to work for a national nonprofit that worked directly with public schools, and I also know what happens when those partners go away," Wisconsin Rep. Kristina Shelton said in a hearing on AB 109.

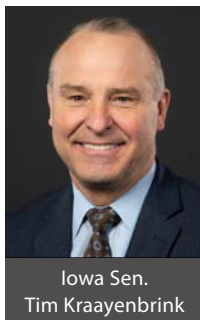
Early in the 2023-2025 state budget process, Gov. Tony Evers and the state superintendent of public instruction proposed allotting \$5 million for a "Do the Math" initiative.

Under this program, which was not included in the final budget, the state would have provided resources to local school districts "to start or improve financial literacy curriculum" and "to develop a regional support network that includes professional development for educators and a model curriculum/scope and sequence for districts to implement."

Derek Cantù is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education & Workforce Development Committee. Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig and Wisconsin Rep. Joel Kitchens serve as committee co-chairs. Minnesota Sen. Heather Gustafson is the vice chair.



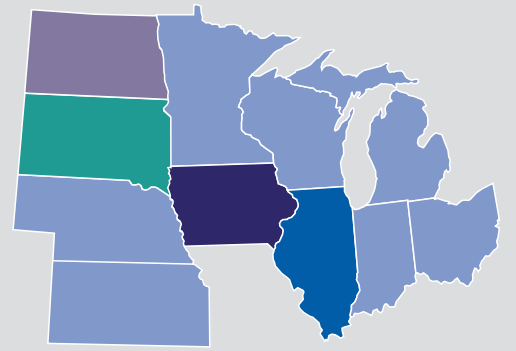
Wisconsin Sen. Joan Ballweg



Iowa Sen. Tim Kraayenbrink



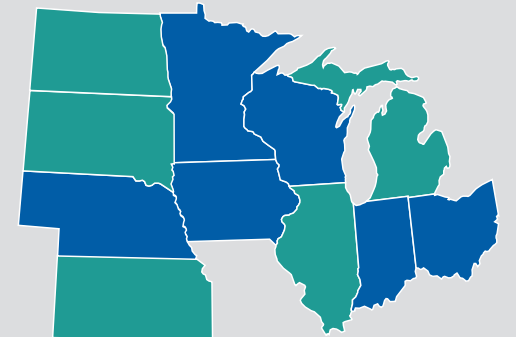
### STATE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS ON PERSONAL FINANCE/FINANCIAL LITERACY INSTRUCTION



- Requires or will require a stand-alone, semester-long course in personal finance/financial literacy
- Requires one half-unit (semester) of instruction in personal financial literacy, either as a stand-alone course or embedded in other courses
- Requires nine weeks of consumer education
- Requires several concepts of personal finance to be embedded within a course on economics or democracy
- Requires a semester-long course in economics or personal finance

Sources: Next Gen Personal Finance, Champlain College Center for Financial Literacy and CSG Midwest research

### STATE-LEVEL ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR INSTRUCTION ON PERSONAL FINANCE IN PRE-K THROUGH 8TH GRADE\*



- Modest amount of content required to be taught
- Substantive amount of content required to be taught

\* States were categorized based on an analysis of academic standards by the Champlain College Center for Financial Literacy. Some states, none in the Midwest, were categorized as not requiring any content on personal finance, according to the center.

### % OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ANY DEBT IN COLLECTIONS\*

State	All ages	Young adults
Illinois	26%	20%
Indiana	28%	24%
Iowa	20%	18%
Kansas	26%	23%
Michigan	26%	20%
Minnesota	13%	10%
Nebraska	18%	13%
North Dakota	16%	15%
Ohio	28%	24%
South Dakota	15%	12%
Wisconsin	20%	19%

\* Data was last updated in October 2023, using credit data from February 2022.

Source: Urban Institute



## EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Rates of chronic absenteeism are much higher than pre-pandemic levels; Indiana is among the states with a new law to address it

by Derek Cantù ([dcantu@csg.org](mailto:dcantu@csg.org))

The long-term consequences for habitually missing school are numerous.

A student falls behind in reading comprehension during the pivotal early grades. Social-emotional development is diminished. And it becomes more common that a young person will not graduate on time or will drop out of school entirely.

In every Midwestern state, students are considered “chronically absent” if they miss 10 percent or more of the school year. This attendance problem worsened during the pandemic, and despite a return to in-person learning, rates of chronic absenteeism have yet to drop back down to pre-pandemic levels (see table for the Midwest).

### GETTING TO THE ROOT CAUSES

The nonprofit initiative Attendance Works categorizes the root causes of chronic absenteeism, placing them into one of four “buckets” (see graphic).

A student’s socioeconomic status can play a role in how many buckets are filled or the severity of the contributing factors that keep them from school — for example, housing insecurity, community violence or a lack of transportation.

But Attendance Works founder and executive director Hedy Chang adds that all young people are susceptible to having attendance impediments, to becoming disengaged with learning, and to

possessing a negative association with the school environment.

“Aspects of the buckets changed during the pandemic,” Chang says.

“[Chronic absenteeism is] deeper and more pervasive in some ways among economically challenged communities. And there are more kids who are not economically challenged who are chronically absent than ever before.”

To turn around this trend, Chang stresses the importance of collecting good, timely data. She points to Connecticut as an example of this approach.

During the pandemic, that state not only adopted a universal definition for both in-person and virtual-learning attendance, but also began collecting attendance data monthly instead of annually.

This new drove of data, plus a commitment to making attendance rates public and promptly addressing any reporting inaccuracies, led to the creation of a home-visit model: the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program.

Visits began being made to the homes of a targeted set of chronically absent students in order to make direct connections with students and their families. Though chronic

absenteeism in Connecticut remains high, these interventions helped to reduce rates by almost 3 percentage points between academic years 2022 and 2023.

The visits also have led to student placements in after-school, summer school and other learning-enrichment programs.

Chang has said, too, that these visits “improved family-school relationships, increased feelings of belonging, improved access to resources, and [led to] greater gratitude and appreciation” — all of which can improve attendance.

### INDIANA'S NEW INTERVENTIONS

Tackling chronic absenteeism was a top priority this year for Indiana lawmakers.

“Almost one in five Indiana students were chronically absent last year,” Sen. Linda Rogers says. “There were 547 schools where a quarter of the students were chronically absent, and 84 schools where half of the students were chronically absent.”

She was a co-sponsor of this year’s SB 282. Signed into law in March, it requires school districts to develop truancy prevention plans while also creating a framework for future state action.

“Absent students,” those missing five days of school within a 10-week span, will be provided with wraparound services to increase the likelihood of attendance and be referred to counseling or mentoring.

The parents/guardians of “absent students” will be required to take part in a school-initiated conference about the attendance problem. They also will be informed about the legal consequences of a student becoming habitually truant, and may be expected to attend counseling or mentoring with their child.

Students with unique attendance barriers — for example, foster care placement, homelessness and life-threatening illness — will receive additional services.

SB 282 also gives Indiana’s attendance officer (who is appointed by the state secretary of education) a new responsibility: regularly collect ideas and recommendations for legislative action from local school officials, and then provide a yearly report to the General Assembly.

Initially, the bill included a more punitive approach: authorizing juvenile courts to impose civil fines of up to \$1,000 on the parents/guardians of habitually truant students.

After receiving feedback from various stakeholders, Rogers says, she and her colleagues amended the bill with a “softer approach.”

Chang says she understands and believes in the idea of holding students and families accountable. But she also suggests that lawmakers be wary of punitive approaches, which often don’t take into account the root causes of absenteeism and also can lead to inequitable treatment.

“You have two kids who are both sick: One kid has a doctor and brings in a doctor’s note, and the other kid doesn’t have access to health care and doesn’t bring a note,” she says. “The kid without the note is going to have the unexcused absence.”

Chang also points to a 2020 report by The Council of State Governments Justice Center on findings from South Carolina. In that state, the CSG study found, the involvement of the juvenile justice system for chronically absent students resulted in even worse attendance rates.

### FINANCIAL ‘NUDGE’?

This year in Ohio, lawmakers have been debating the efficacy of a new way to boost attendance — financial incentives.

Under HB 348, the state would establish two pilot programs. The first would provide cash transfers ranging from \$25 to \$500 to a select group of kindergarten and ninth-grade families whose students maintain an attendance rate of at least 90 percent within a two-week, quarterly or yearlong period.

The second pilot program would award selected students \$250 for graduating high school, and an additional \$250 for maintaining a grade-point average of 3.0.

“My seventh-grade social studies teacher always told us, ‘Always remember this kids, Money isn’t

everything, but it’s way ahead of whatever’s in second place,’” Rep. Bill Seitz, one of the bill’s two primary sponsors, said during a committee hearing on previous incentives that schools have offered to improve attendance.

The attendance-specific pilot program would target schools with the highest quartile of chronic absenteeism in Ohio.

“[What we want to test is] how many people there are who could be nudged or who could be moved with a cash incentive to shift toward a culture of daily and regular attendance,” says the bill’s other main sponsor, Rep. Dani Isaacsohn.

Derek Cantù is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education & Workforce Development Committee. Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig and Wisconsin Rep. Joel Kitchens serve as committee co-chairs. Minnesota Sen. Heather Gustafson is the vice chair.

### RATES AND TRENDS IN CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN THE MIDWEST STATES

State	% of students who missed 10 percent or more of school days		
	2022-'23	2021-'22	2018-'19
Illinois	28.3%	29.8%	17.5%
Indiana	19.3%	21.1%	10.6%
Iowa	25.6%	21.0%	12.0%
Kansas	21.8%	25.4%	13.9%
Michigan	30.8%	38.5%	19.7%
Minnesota	30.2%	Data not found, but pre-pandemic rates were about 15%	
Nebraska	22.4%	23.9%	14.7%
North Dakota	20.0%	22.0%	12.0%
Ohio	26.8%	30.2%	16.7%
South Dakota	21.0%	22.0%	14.0%
Wisconsin	22.7% (for 2021-'22; 2022-'23 not found on state website)		12.9%

Source: FutureEd and CSG Midwest research of state department of education websites



### ROOT CAUSES OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: THE FOUR ‘BUCKETS’ AS IDENTIFIED BY ATTENDANCE WORKS

Barriers	Aversion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronic and acute illness</li> <li>Family responsibilities or home situation</li> <li>Trauma</li> <li>Poor transportation</li> <li>Housing and food insecurity</li> <li>Inequitable access to needed services</li> <li>Involvement in justice system</li> <li>Lack of predictable schedules for learning</li> <li>Lack of access to technology</li> <li>Community violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Struggling academically or behaviorally</li> <li>Unwelcoming school climate</li> <li>Social and peer challenges</li> <li>Anxiety</li> <li>Biased disciplinary and suspension practices</li> <li>Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations</li> <li>Caregivers had negative educational experiences</li> </ul>
Disengagement	Misconceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction</li> <li>Bored</li> <li>No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)</li> <li>Lack of enrichment opportunities</li> <li>Lack of academic and behavioral support</li> <li>Failure to earn credits</li> <li>Need to work conflicts with being in high school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused</li> <li>Missing 2 days per month doesn’t affect learning</li> <li>Lose track and underestimate total absences</li> <li>Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness</li> <li>Attendance only matters in the older grades</li> <li>Suspensions don’t count as absence</li> </ul>

## SPOTLIGHT ON SUMMER WORK OF CSG MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

The interstate, bipartisan committees of The Council of State Governments' Midwestern Legislative Conference met in July at the MLC Annual Meeting in Columbus, Ohio. This Issue Briefs section (pages 4 to 8) covers sessions that these committees organized and offered to all meeting attendees. Also included is an article on a separate plenary session on the Midwest's energy future. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus and MLC Fiscal Leaders Forum led sessions at the MLC Annual Meeting as well.

The MLC counts all legislators from 11 states and the province of Saskatchewan as members; Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario are affiliate members. Committees of the MLC are made up of legislators from these states and provinces.

Photos in this section, and throughout this edition of *Stateline Midwest*, were taken by Matt Shadle, digital media manager for the Ohio Senate. For more information on the committees, and to view presentations from these July meetings and sessions, visit [csgmidwest.org](http://csgmidwest.org).



Each of the MLC's six policy committees has two legislative co-chairs and one or two vice chairs. Pictured at the MLC Annual Meeting are Michigan Rep. Amos O'Neal and Manitoba MLA Kelvin Goertzen, who oversaw the work of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee as co-chairs. Ontario MPP Ernie Hardeman has now succeeded Goertzen as committee co-chair. North Rep. David Monson is the vice chair. An article on a July session of this committee can be found on page 6.

## EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Colleges, states rethink approach to college-level 'remedial' education; new K-12 supports also considered

The decision to invest in a college education comes with opportunity costs, including time commitment, debt and delayed income earning.

Adding to these challenges, many students find starting with remedial coursework an unwelcome and unnecessary barrier to postsecondary, and ultimately career, advancement.

A body of research shows, in fact, that remedial or "developmental" education does not significantly improve students' abilities to tackle college-level work.

"About 15 years ago, and even before that, there started to be more data showing that many [college] students who were starting in developmental education ... were leaving the courses," Katie Beal said in July during a session at the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting.

Beal, who works on education policy for the nonprofit, nonpartisan MDRC, added that "very few were moving on to the college-level courses and passing them, and then even fewer students were earning the degree."

Along with Beal, other policy experts and legislators shared their insights, exploring alternatives to the traditional approach to remedial education, as well as state-level intervention strategies for high school students. The MLC Education and Workforce Development Committee organized the session.

### CHANGING INTERVENTIONS

Traditionally, college students have been placed in entry-level math and English classes — sometimes referred to as "gatekeeper" courses — based solely on their performance on a placement test. Students with low test scores are put in remedial classes before advancing to other college-level work.

Under one alternative approach, the Multiple Measures Assessment, additional factors are considered when determining a student's level of placement, including high school grade-point average or noncognitive indicators.

% OF COLLEGE STUDENTS REPORTING EVER HAVING TAKEN A POSTSECONDARY REMEDIAL COURSE		
	2020	2016
Students in public two-year colleges	40%	56%
Students in public four-year colleges	25%	31%

*Source: New America analysis of the "National Postsecondary Student Aid Study" (2020)*

Beal referenced a randomized controlled trial conducted across five community colleges in Minnesota and Wisconsin. (The trial was done by the MDRC, along with researchers at Columbia University's Community College Research Center.)

The Multiple Measures method did have an effect. First, some students with low placement scores but strong high school GPAs got "bumped up": they were given an advantage in course placement because of the measurement tool.

After three semesters, these "bumped-up" students were enrolled in more college-level courses and were more likely to complete gatekeeping courses compared to those students who underwent the traditional developmental education route.

"Multiple Measures is a relatively low-cost intervention, although it does take resources to switch over," Beal said.

"In [a more recent] study, the Multiple Measures placement reduced costs by about \$140 per student, and that's mostly because of savings from students taking fewer developmental education credits."

Another option is co-requisite learning: Students advance immediately to entry-level classes while concurrently receiving supplemental instruction and being enrolled in other college-level courses. Additionally, Beal said, colleges can look to better align math requirements with a student's chosen major.

"It may make more sense, for instance, for a journalism major to take a statistics course as [their] entry-level math course instead of an algebra course," she said.

### ADDRESSING RACIAL GAPS

For Mike Abrahamson of the

"Interventions can be flexible, can be provided by a district, a third party or both, and must be aligned with the student's academic instruction."

*Ohio Sen. Andrew Brenner, on a bill to provide new services for K-12 students who demonstrate limited skill on a state assessment*

Illinois-based Partnership for College Completion, the argument over the utility of placement tests ignores a larger issue facing students.

"That debate has always sounded like debating over what the best thermometer would be when we don't even agree what the temperature for a fever is," he said.

Abrahamson suggested the emphasis should instead be on reducing the overrepresentation of minority students in remedial courses.

Abrahamson described Illinois' 2021 omnibus education bill, HB 2170, a measure advocated by the Legislative Black Caucus.

The law notes that in 2019, 71 percent of Black students enrolled in Illinois community colleges were placed in developmental educational courses compared to 42 percent of White students.

Under the law, all community colleges are required to implement a Multiple Measures approach to placement that considers high school GPA and transfer credits. Additionally, the colleges are collecting new data, including on student demographics and course completion rates, and developing plans to improve outcomes.

The Partnership for College Completion has since collaborated with colleges across Illinois to collect and analyze this information.

According to a progress report published in early 2024, between 2020 and 2021, statewide enrollment in developmental English and developmental math dropped, by 3.6 and 12.4 percent, respectively.

The co-requisite approach already had been implemented on many campuses prior to the passage of HB 2170, and the progress report points to success with this approach.

For example, in 2020, 18 percent of students enrolled in "compressed" math courses (which combine multiple math subjects into one class) went on to pass a gatekeeper course, while 56 percent of students using co-requisite supports

passed their gatekeeper course. Pell Grant recipients were also five times more likely to pass gatekeeper math courses using co-requisite supports compared to those using traditional remedial classes.

Although changes to remedial education approaches can have a positive causal effect on outcomes like graduation rates, other factors can contribute to student success.

For example, Beal highlighted successes from the ASAP Ohio program.

Based on the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, this initiative is used in three Ohio community colleges. It provides various wraparound supports — including enhanced advising, financial assistance and condensed class scheduling — to Pell Grant recipients who took developmental education courses.

According to a 2023 report by MDRC, after six years, 44 percent of students who received these supports graduated compared to 29 percent of students in the control groups. ASAP students were also more likely to go on to earn a bachelor's degree.

### REACHING HIGH SCHOOL AGES

Ohio has also looked at introducing interventions for students prior to entering college. SB 162, which passed out of the Ohio Senate in late 2023, would require high schools to provide free, evidence-based interventions (such as high-dosage tutoring) for students with demonstrated needs in English and math.

"The types of interventions can be flexible, can be provided by [a school] district, a third party or both, and must be aligned with the student's academic instruction," said Sen. Andrew Brenner, the author of SB 162.

Article written by Derek Cantù, who serves as CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education and Workforce Development Committee. He can be reached at [dcantu@csg.org](mailto:dcantu@csg.org).



Wisconsin Rep. Joel Kitchens and Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig preside over a session of the MLC Education and Workforce Development Committee, which explored topics such as academic remediation, literacy, and the alignment of state workforce needs and education systems. Craig and Kitchens are the committee co-chairs; Minnesota Sen. Heather Gustafson is the vice chair.

# EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## School librarians: Integral to learning in some schools, absent in others

by Derek Cantù ([dcantu@csq.org](mailto:dcantu@csq.org))

The typical American school experience consists of some common traits; recess, field trips, group projects, social cliques and whole-school assemblies, to name a few examples.

For many students, visits to the school library are part of this list as well. It's where they can find a quiet place to study, learn something new through reading, or take part in a Scholastic Book Fair.

What's typical for many students, however, is out of reach for others.

More than 12 percent of U.S. public schools didn't have a library media center in 2020-'21, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. (The lack of a library is much more prevalent in charter schools compared to traditional public schools.) A separate national study, done by the SLIDE project, estimates that 29.5 percent of U.S. schools didn't have librarians during that same school year. In the Midwest, the estimate was 32.7 percent.

"As a teacher in a Detroit charter school without a school library, I saw

the negative impact of no library and scarce resources on both the staff and students in my school," Michigan Sen. Darrin Camilleri says.

"We need to help all students have

the resources they need to succeed, including grade-level-aligned texts and knowledgeable, accessible school librarians."

He has introduced bills (SB 741-SB 743) requiring every public school to have a library and to employ at least one librarian, either part-time or full-time depending on student population size. Under Camilleri's legislation (still in committee as of October), Michigan schools could seek a state waiver from the librarian mandate. It would be automatically granted to schools/districts with fewer than 51 pupils.

### NEBRASKA: LIBRARIAN MANDATE

Few states in the Midwest mandate that K-12 schools have libraries as well as employ librarians.

One exception is Nebraska. Under current law there, the staffing requirements are scaled based on school size. For example, a school with

a population of between 70 and 249 students must have a certified teacher with an endorsement in library sciences who devotes at least one-fifth of his or her time to library media services.

However, even with this state requirement, Nebraska's school librarians struggle with diminishing budgets, increased responsibilities with limited prep time, and public misinformation about the profession, says Courtney Pentland, a school librarian in Lincoln, Neb. (Note: Pentland is immediate past president of the American Association of School Librarians; her comments for this article are based solely on her work as a school librarian, not with the association.)

### ROLE IN STUDENT LEARNING

Pentland compares the role of a school librarian to that of a cruise ship director.

"We're the person that keeps the ship going in the right direction, but we also have all of these other things that we have to maintain to make sure that we're serving our population the best way we can," she says.

In addition to assisting and supervising students, today's school librarians must act as a cooperative and sometimes lead instructor (for example, as it relates to new literacy education approaches such as the "science of reading"), an academic research expert, a procurement officer, an event planner (given that the physical library space is usually one of the largest rooms in a school), and a media specialist who teaches students to differentiate legitimate sources from disinformation and AI-manipulated content.

Recent research points to the positive academic benefits that full-time certified librarians can have. When analyzing the academic performance of North Carolina students from similar demographic backgrounds, the authors of a 2023 Old Dominion University study found that "students who attend schools with a full-time certified librarian have higher math and reading test scores than students who do not."

"School librarians see the big picture and help students build on prior knowledge and make connections in ways that may not be available or familiar to classroom teachers," the authors noted, cautioning that further research was needed to determine some of the most impactful practices used by librarians.

For states that don't require librarians, Pentland says, library services are usually one of the first areas to get cut. The comparatively higher level of advanced education needed to become a librarian — a master's degree or, at least, several hours of additional coursework in many states — also makes recruitment efforts a challenge.

And for states that do require school librarians, the job can entail having to juggle dual teaching roles while traveling between multiple schools with limited prep time.

Pentland also says a rise in misinformation about school librarians, and the in-person or online harassment that follows, is causing individuals

to leave or give second thought to entering the profession.

According to a 2023 *School Library Journal* survey, 24 percent of respondents reported harassment in the previous year related to library books or displays. Results from that same survey found that the Midwestern region had the largest share of school librarians who have considered leaving the profession or taking early retirement — 41 percent.

"The [state] bills that have been passed or attempted to be passed that would criminalize librarians and educators for doing their jobs, ones that maybe restrict access to scholarly databases or maybe restrict their ability to purchase materials ... it makes some [librarians] question whether it's worth it," Pentland says.

### TWO NEW LAWS IN MINNESOTA

Providing more supports for school librarians is among the goals of two new laws in Minnesota.

Last year, as part of its omnibus education bill (HF 2497), the Legislature allocated \$1 million for a statewide census of school libraries. Those dollars also are being used to help recruit and retain school librarians through professional development opportunities and tuition assistance for those seeking licensure.

Of the 1,800 schools that had responded to the state survey as of October 2024, 80.6 percent reported having a library media center.

Sen. Mary Kunesch, chief sponsor of the bill and a former school library media specialist herself, says the survey also sought

answers to other questions: "What sort of support systems [are] you providing? What support systems are you missing? What kind of collaborative relationships do you have with your county libraries, your state?"

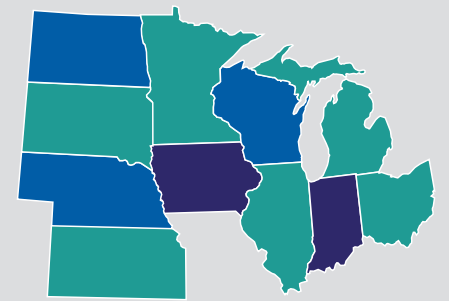
According to Kunesch, policymakers will use the information to help expand library access.

This year, Minnesota legislators created the position of "state school librarian" (HF 5237). This individual will help school librarians across the state develop reading and media literacy curricula, support academic standards, secure grants, access library data collections, and provide guidance on book-removal requests.

Kunesch also envisions the state school librarian evolving into an unofficial legislative liaison, one who can provide a "direct link from the school library media specialist to the Legislature."

Derek Cantù is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education & Workforce Development Committee. Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig and Wisconsin Rep. Joel Kitchens serve as committee co-chairs. Minnesota Sen. Heather Gustafson is the vice chair.

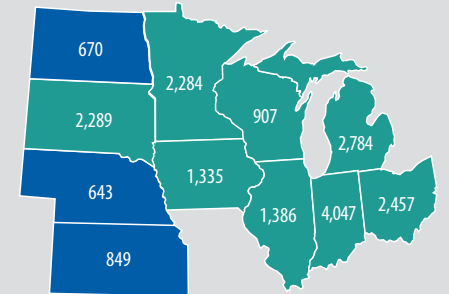
### STATE-LEVEL REQUIREMENTS, BY STATUTE OR REGULATION, FOR SCHOOLS TO EMPLOY FULL- OR PART-TIME LIBRARIANS



- Mandate in place and enforced in some way
- Unenforced mandate
- No mandate found

Source: EveryLibrary Institute

### # OF STUDENTS PER SCHOOL LIBRARIAN IN STATE'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AS OF FALL 2022\*



Student-to-librarian ratio is lower than U.S. ratio (1,262 students per school librarian)

Student-to-librarian ratio is higher than U.S. ratio (1,262 students per school librarian)

\* The ratio is a CSG Midwest calculation of National Center on Education Statistics' data on public school enrollment and employment of full-time-equivalent librarians



Michigan Sen. Darrin Camilleri



Minnesota Sen. Mary Kunesch



STAFFING OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES BY EACH MIDWESTERN STATE'S PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS		
State	% that continuously employed a school librarian over a 4-year period <sup>1</sup>	% with library support staff, but no school librarian (2018-'19)
Illinois	44.7%	0.0%
Indiana	63.1%	25.9%
Iowa	96.4%	0.9%
Kansas	54.2%	30.4%
Michigan	22.3%	31.5%
Minnesota	41.6%	45.9%
Nebraska	98.4%	0.0%
North Dakota	77.1%	5.3%
Ohio	55.8%	29.8%
South Dakota	34.9%	24.2%
Wisconsin	86.1%	6.2%

<sup>1</sup> For school years 2015-'16 through 2018-'19.

Source: *The School Librarian Investigation — Divergence & Evolution*, or SLIDE (2021)