

Toward the Big Blur

Reshaping Teaching and Learning for Grades 11-14



AT A GLANCE

Jobs for the Future's Big Blur vision calls for entirely new educational institutions and systems to better prepare 16-to-20-year-olds for college and careers. This paper examines new structures for teaching and learning to help states create more effective grade 11-14 schools and systems, with examples of promising state-level instructor models.

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About This Paper

JFF's 2021 [Big Blur](#) paper argues for a radical restructuring of education for grades 11-14 by erasing the arbitrary dividing line between high school and college to open opportunities for the learners our current systems leave behind.

We make the case for an entirely new type of public institution, neither high school nor college, designed to better meet the needs of 16-to-20-year-olds by enabling them to earn a postsecondary credential and prepare for a career—free of charge.

This paper outlines new types of instructor preparation, accountability systems, and learning management structures that are needed to effectively serve the developmental needs of young people in grades 11-14 and the unified system envisioned in the Big Blur. See our previous papers on [governance](#), [finance](#), and [dual enrollment](#) for more insights on state policy moves toward the Big Blur.



Fulfilling the Big Blur vision will require seismic shifts in existing state systems and policies, including in these four key areas:



Incentives for accountability and financing to promote new ways of organizing learning



Alignment of high schools, colleges, and labor markets so that students in grade 11 enter new institutional structures focused on postsecondary and career preparation



A **governance** model that unifies decision-making authority over grades 11-14, as well as over districts and postsecondary institutions that are working as a unified institution



Staffing structures designed to equip specially trained educators and leaders to teach, curate, and organize learning and work experiences and support systems for students in grades 11-14

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Introduction

The current U.S. secondary education, postsecondary education, and workforce training systems are failing to serve the needs of many of today's students. Securing a good job with a family-sustaining wage increasingly requires workers to possess industry certifications, degrees, and credentials, but U.S. education systems aren't set up to help enough students secure them. In addition, there are significant economic disruptions on the horizon that are going to have big implications for the future of education and work. The rapidly accelerating development of artificial intelligence, the fundamental realignment of the economy that's needed to achieve carbon neutrality, and the changes to the world of work brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic are all reordering the workforce that today's young people will enter in the coming years.

Efforts to improve upon the existing systems through alignment and incentives haven't yielded the transformational success for all students that the demands of a 21st-century economy require. The reality is that the current systems, particularly secondary and postsecondary education, are too different from each other to create completely

seamless pathways for all students. While some students can successfully navigate between divergent education systems to find success in college and career, many are struggling.

The Big Blur calls for a radical rethinking of how education and workforce training systems are structured. It calls for erasing the boundaries between high schools, colleges, and the world of work to create a completely new system with institutions specifically designed to meet the needs of young adults ages 16-20. Within these new institutions, covering what we know now as grades 11-14, the Big Blur calls for a rethinking of all aspects of how students learn, grow, and prepare for careers.

In the same way the Big Blur requires reimagining how we [fund these institutions](#) and [govern them](#), we must also think critically about how to dramatically improve instruction and learning environments for young adults.

The Big Blur calls for a rethinking of all aspects of how students learn, grow, and prepare for careers.

Jobs for the Future (JFF) is seeking to start a conversation about the necessity of reimagining the role of instructors and the structures of grade 11-14 learning environments that dictate how young adults learn, what they learn, and how they prepare for the world of work. Key to the vision of the Big Blur is how instruction systems are organized, funded, and held accountable; how instructors are credentialed, assessed, and incentivized to teach differently; how career navigation and other student supports are embedded into learning environments like the classroom; and how we create dynamic, engaging working environments for instructors operating in Big Blur institutions.

This brief primarily addresses the educators who provide students with core instructional experiences that include skills development and content mastery. There are other important roles on the learning teams we envision being created in Big Blur institutions that this brief does not address in detail, such as staff members who primarily provide students with career navigation services or lead engagement with employers to create pathways for students into work-based learning and other employer-provided opportunities.





Reimagining Learning Environments for the Big Blur

As JFF argued in the groundbreaking Big Blur [paper](#), young people ages 16–20 have specific developmental needs that stand apart from those of younger students.¹ These older adolescents are more like adults than children. Starting at age 15, young people’s capacity for abstract thought increases; they learn quickly and begin to set long-term goals. It’s an ideal time for them to explore their interests, start thinking about their futures, and begin to work so they can grow their competency and autonomy.²

The Big Blur paper argues that, rather than remaining in school with younger peers, these students are better suited developmentally to learn from older peers and adult mentors in mixed age groups.

In the Big Blur vision, the conception of where students learn also expands, so they may acquire knowledge, gain skills, or develop competencies in classrooms, workplaces, and field experiences. In the current system, the classroom is king. And while instruction in environments that resemble traditional classrooms would continue to occur, the Big Blur learning environment would be larger and more completely embody the range of experiences students need in order to prepare for rewarding careers.

For instance, in the Big Blur vision, all young adults would have opportunities to develop and apply their knowledge and skills in workplace settings. We envision these work-based learning experiences to be fully integrated into the continuum of teaching and learning across grades 11–14. In such a scenario, students would perform meaningful job tasks that enable them to develop the knowledge, the readiness for work, and the skills that support entry into or advancement in a particular career field. Additionally, they would have opportunities to build professional networks and demonstrate transferrable competencies that address and navigate unanticipated real-world problems. This promotes the agency of young adults, enabling them to better engage in self-advocacy and manage their career paths.

The Student Learning Environment

Instructors support relevant student experiences anywhere within these learning environments.



A Different Kind of Instructor

To accomplish the goal of creating a new system with institutions that actually blur the lines between secondary education, postsecondary education, and the world of work, we need instructors to assume a different role. This will require teachers to meet the following criteria:

- Have equal parts expertise in subject matter and pedagogy that is attuned to the developmental stage of young adults and the rigor required for satisfactory completion of a postsecondary program of study
- Possess knowledge of theory and practice and be able to serve primarily as a guide rather than a lecturer—facilitating learning through work and other experiences, not just providing classroom instruction
- Be able to assess student learning, primarily based on mastery of competencies above all other approaches
- Play an important role in cultivating the social and emotional well-being and occupational identity of students, and help them build agency and their capacity for self-advocacy
- Have industry experience to be able to (co)design and deliver career-connected curricula, including through work-based learning experiences

This is uncharted territory with little precedent in policy or practice to draw from directly.





Current Approaches That Assess Teaching and Learning Are Failing Students

The idea of creating a new instructor workforce to staff an entirely new educational institution seems, on the face of it, to be an audacious proposition. The existing K-12 and postsecondary instructor workforce systems have been well established for generations and have their own philosophies, values, and approaches. What we're proposing is an educational model that is neither a high school nor a college and is staffed with instructors who have the skills to teach students ages 16-20.

Our systems, as currently designed, aren't conducive to the type of learning environment for young adults envisioned in the Big Blur. Most high school courses have limited relevance to postsecondary study or careers. Many high schools also don't have the resources to build systems that provide students with meaningful work-based learning or early college experiences that advance their access to college and career.³ Meanwhile, many community colleges don't provide students with the supports necessary to successfully navigate the postsecondary environment to the completion of a meaningful degree or credential. Additionally, many college courses aren't designed

around career relevance and are ambiguous in terms of how they support students in advancing in a dynamic workforce.

To be clear, the inadequacy of the systems to support student needs is a consequence of the misalignment and siloing of the systems; it is not the fault of instructors, who do important work every day to support their students through high school and the first two years of postsecondary education. High school teachers and community college professors operate in the environments that have been created for them, and many do an excellent job of overcoming the systemic barriers to imparting key skills, competencies, and a sense of agency in their students to propel them into the workforce or higher education. In fact, the novel approach to teaching envisioned in the Big Blur would likely be quite appealing to many current teachers and would attract more people to join the teaching workforce.

The inadequacy of the systems to support student needs is not the fault of instructors.

The Big Blur Empowers Instructors and Helps Solve Instructor Workforce Challenges

Current systems—both in K-12 and higher education—are failing instructors. The K-12 instructor workforce is in crisis: Teachers are underpaid, overworked, and tasked with helping young people overcome significant challenges.⁴ Such factors have caused considerable recruitment and retention challenges that continue to grow.⁵ Meanwhile, community college professors face threats to their job security due to declining enrollments (both due to declining birth rates and as a result of COVID-19 pandemic), and their compensation is too low, particularly for adjunct professors.⁶

The Big Blur, and the vision for instructors outlined in this brief, should not be viewed as one more complicating factor compounding a series of already complicated factors but as a potential solution to some of the big questions and challenges facing instructors in high schools and community colleges. The Big Blur vision aims to create an instructor workforce that enables both students and instructors to thrive.

In comparison to many of the instructors working within the systems operating today, Big Blur instructors would be well compensated and supported, have established routes for professional growth in teaching, and feel valued for the important role they play in helping students reach the first level of degree or credential attainment in their college and career journeys. These institutions would be designed to support instructors and their needs, as well as those of students, to build a better-functioning education system for all young adults and the instructors and staff members who support them.

Current Policies are Incongruent with the Big Blur

There are four major policy conditions that govern the current teaching and learning infrastructures in K-12 and postsecondary education: accountability, credentialing, incentives, and capacity. Together, these four policy levers have a big influence on how teaching happens and what students learn. In their current arrangement, they are impeding progress toward the Big Blur's vision for a seamless educational experience for young people ages 16-20 that is focused on postsecondary completion and connections to careers. This is a consequence of two different systems—secondary and postsecondary—that have different priorities and anticipated outcomes and are not optimized to fulfill the goals of the Big Blur.

How teachers and professors are credentialed, the requirements (or lack thereof) that they must fulfill, and the approval mechanisms that allow them to teach have a significant impact on how teaching and learning function in K-12 and higher education. How we incentivize teachers to prioritize specific aspects of student learning or to advance their careers can also have a big impact on what happens in the classroom. How we fund schools and colleges also has a significant effect on how teaching and learning are structured and what functions of teaching and learning are valued most.



Attempting to transpose existing accountability systems, instructor systems, incentives, or funding models, either from high schools or community colleges, into the new system called for by the Big Blur is not going to result in the kinds of learning opportunities that will support students' developmental needs and set them up for career success.

	K-12	Postsecondary
Accountability	Accountability systems in K-12 are governed by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, which outlines how states should hold schools accountable. Assessments are based on a combination of factors, including standardized test results, English proficiency, and graduation rates. States also use graduation requirements to shape students' experiences as they work toward earning a high school diploma.	Postsecondary accountability systems are governed by accreditors, who provide institutions with access to federal financial aid systems based on assessments of factors such as the college's academics, operations, admissions, and services.
Credentialing	K-12 teachers typically seek specific education qualifications at the bachelor's or postgraduate degree level and then must be licensed to teach in a specific state through its licensure process.	In higher education, accreditors ensure that institutions are developing and consistently applying faculty credentialing systems. In community colleges, this typically requires instructors to possess master's degrees in the subjects they're teaching or at least 18 graduate credit hours in that discipline for general education, as well as specific industry experience for teaching career and technical education courses.
Incentives	In both K-12 and higher education, instructors can receive financial benefits for pursuing certain qualifications or participating in specific activities that go above and beyond their core job descriptions.	
Capacity	In both K-12 and higher education, funding mechanisms largely provide resources to institutions based on the number of hours of instruction that a student receives, usually calculated in terms of Carnegie units, and provide limited support for nontraditional members of the teaching staff, such as career navigators.	



Take accountability systems in K-12 as an example. Even though the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was designed to move accountability systems away from the extremely divisive high-stakes testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act toward a middle ground, the debate continues over testing and its efficacy in holding schools accountable for teaching and learning.⁷ And while many states have included college and career readiness indicators in the plans they are required to develop under ESSA, few have used their state plans as opportunities to reform their college and career readiness systems.⁸ The result is that accountability systems at the K-12 level largely describe the existing college and career readiness opportunities for students in schools rather than focusing on making substantive advancements in or improvements to them.

Meanwhile, in higher education, the main accountability lever is through the accreditation system. In order to access federal financial aid, institutions of higher education must receive recognition from a federally approved accrediting agency. This accreditation process focuses on examining fundamentals of the college's setup, like the academic experience it provides, how students are admitted, what services they are offered, and the college's financial sustainability. But accreditation very rarely considers outcomes, such as whether students' college experiences prepare them well for careers after the completion of their studies.⁹ Other levers, such as gainful employment and the College Scorecard, hold limited sway in holding colleges accountable for student outcomes. After years of design and implementation, such efforts are still being litigated in court or are not seen as fulfilling their potential to advance student outcomes.

Policy also has a role to play in how instructor preparation systems at the K-12 and higher education levels function. These systems are currently not set up with the goals of the Big Blur in mind. In K-12, teachers are primarily credentialed based on their knowledge of pedagogy and assessed based on student learning in the classroom. Instructors in higher education, meanwhile, receive virtually no pedagogical instruction and are deemed credentialed instructors based on their knowledge of the discipline they are teaching, not on whether they know how to use that knowledge to support their students in achieving postsecondary success and securing a job with a living wage.

Underpinning all of this is a lack of incentives for teachers to think about instruction as anything more than what happens in a traditional classroom setting, plus an awareness that federal and state funding models are based on how much time students spend in such settings. These policy and systemic underpinnings in both K-12 and higher education stand in the way of the system transformation necessary to achieve the goals of the Big Blur.



Credentialing Teachers for Dual Enrollment Is Not Enough

Current efforts to blur the lines between high schools and colleges focus on dual enrollment.¹⁰ As a result, significant time and resources have been invested in attempting to ensure that high school teachers have the credentials to teach college courses in high school. This usually means a master's degree or 18 graduate credits in the discipline they are teaching.¹¹

However, dual enrollment instructor credentialing is an insufficient solution for the Big Blur because it does not address the underlying cause of tension between the two instructor systems: K-12 teacher preparation focuses on pedagogy, and postsecondary instructor preparation focuses on content. If we need instructors who are both great teachers and have a rich knowledge of the subject matter they are teaching, the current system is always going to fail at providing for these needs at scale.

In the dual enrollment context, it's often difficult to convince midcareer high school teachers to pursue additional graduate credits, and postsecondary instructors can be suspicious of the quality of courses taught by high school instructors, even when they have the appropriate credentials.¹² Therefore, as we implement the Big Blur, it's essential that we move away from the "high school teacher" and "community college professor" distinction. We must instead foster the development of instructors who have specialized training in pedagogy and content, along with other necessary skills, so they can successfully teach students in this age cohort and help them successfully attain a postsecondary credential of value and enter a career.

As we design new instructor preparation systems, looking to organizations like the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), who have experience in designing and deploying quality assurance mechanisms for existing dual enrollment programs, will be critical in charting the transition from a combined instructor workforce toward an entirely new instructor workforce for this age group of students.¹³

The Role of Federal Policy

The accountability systems for high schools and colleges have different incentives for institutions, as well as different philosophies about instruction. This is largely driven by federal laws, such as ESSA and Perkins V and their respective accountability systems, and the Higher Education Act's role in accreditation. As a result, there will necessarily be a federal component when rethinking how a Big Blur system would hold its institutions accountable and who would be responsible for doing so. In addition, federal policy for education will need to be realigned away from use of the Carnegie unit toward the use of competency-based education to drive and underpin national adoption of the Big Blur vision. However, state policy need not wait for federal policy to catch up to the needs of young adults, and many of these concepts and ideas can be advanced at the state level, absent federal policy change.



Key State Policy Levers for Developing Learning Environments and the Teacher Workforce for the Big Blur

To achieve the Big Blur, we need to rethink the policy systems within which teaching and learning happen, including the accountability systems under which institutions operate, how we train and incentivize instructors to support students, and the learning management structures within which students move. By rethinking these systems, we can create a learning environment suitable for addressing the developmental needs of young adults ages 16-20.

In this section, we highlight concrete policy approaches that move in the direction of the Big Blur. It is important to note, however, that no policy approaches that fully and firmly create a Big Blur learning environment and fundamentally dismantle and replace current systems and structures for young adults have yet taken hold.





POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Accountability

Develop New Accountability Models for Big Blur Institutions and Instructors

A shift to the Big Blur and the creation of new institutions to replace high schools and community colleges will require new state and federal accountability systems specific to those institutions. They must appropriately measure both the outcomes we want to see and how well those institutions are serving the needs of students in grades 11-14.

Instructors would be a small component of any such accountability system, which should be focused on student outcomes and how well their specific needs are being met. Measures of student outcomes should include subject matter expertise and workforce readiness, along with an assessment of the quality and rigor of the content being taught.

But even before the full realization of the Big Blur vision and a unified accountability system for institutions, state policy can be used to create learning environments that achieve that vision and ensure that students' educational experiences are focused on securing credentials of value and worthwhile employment.



Policy Recommendations

- **Revamp high school graduation standards to fully incorporate college and career.** States' high school graduation requirements should fully integrate college and career readiness and support services to ensure that high school is fully recognized as a waypoint on a student's journey toward a postsecondary credential of value and into a good job. These new high school graduation standards should incorporate core academics alongside competencies connected to employability skills and postsecondary readiness by making high-quality options for dual enrollment and work-based learning widely and equitably available.
- **Use state funding in postsecondary education to focus instruction on outcomes.** State policy has few levers to deploy to change the postsecondary accreditation system, which is governed by the federal Higher Education Act. However, states can increase postsecondary institutions' focus on student outcomes by pairing a system in which they do have significant leverage—state funding—with accreditation to ensure that postsecondary courses are both high quality and aligned to supporting student workforce outcomes. States should aim to develop performance-based funding models that reward colleges when their students successfully complete postsecondary credentials and achieve specific workforce outcomes, like employment after graduation. States should also consider ways to use their funding systems to reward colleges for changing the mechanisms for how students learn, and shift from using seat time as an educational metric toward competency-based measures.

EXAMPLE

Indiana GPS Diploma Plus

Indiana is in the process of significantly revamping its high school graduation standards for the first time since the 1980s. The state's goal is to maximize students' ability to personalize their learning pathways and experiences while placing significant emphasis on demonstrating college and career readiness and developing employability skills.¹⁴ The new diploma standards are expected to align with the state's graduation pathways, as well as with the student success characteristics underlying the Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed (GPS) dashboard: academic mastery; career and postsecondary readiness (credentials and experiences); communication and collaboration; work ethic; and civic, financial, and digital literacy.¹⁵

Under the Indiana GPS Diploma and Indiana GPS Diploma Plus proposal, students would seek to complete foundational coursework and competencies in the ninth and 10th grades so that they could place a greater emphasis on college and career readiness experiences aligned to their post-high school goals in grades 11 and 12. If adopted, Indiana's new diploma standards would include three components: completing required academic courses, developing employability skills through work-based learning, and attaining credentials of value or other postsecondary experiences.¹⁶

Indiana's proposal, which is on track to be adopted in the summer of 2024, moves the state closer to achieving the vision of the Big Blur by ensuring that the educational experiences of students in the critical age range of 16-20 fully support their ability to secure credentials and thrive in the workplace.



EXAMPLE

Texas House Bill 8

Texas passed a law in 2023 that increased the emphasis on student outcomes in the state's funding model for community colleges. The law is designed to make institutions of higher education more thoughtful in designing programs and services that support student success in higher education and preparing those students for employment in high-demand careers.

Under House Bill 8, community colleges' funding formula is based on the following factors:¹⁷

- The number of credentials of value awarded, including badges, certificates, and degrees, that position graduates for well-paying jobs
- Credentials of value awarded in high-demand fields where employers are looking for skilled employees
- Successful student transfers from community colleges to four-year universities
- Completion of a sequence of dual credit courses, which are offered to high school students and can set them on early pathways to success

Though Texas's new law is about how colleges are funded, it is likely to have a significant impact on the way that instruction is developed and provided by community colleges in the state. Colleges must be much more deliberate about providing students with high-quality courses that lead to high-demand, high-wage occupations. It exemplifies a significant way to use macro-level state funding policy as a mechanism to affect postsecondary teaching and learning.





POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Credentialing

Design Instructor Preparation Programs for the Big Blur

Many educator preparation programs provide early childhood educators with specialized instruction and content focused on the unique needs of their students.¹⁸ Likewise, there should be specialized preparation for Big Blur instructors, who will have the significant responsibility of supporting students ages 16-20 in earning a postsecondary degree or credential and embarking on a career. This training regimen should include a mix of pedagogical and subject matter expertise appropriate for teaching grades 11-14. Additionally, instructors should receive training on how to develop student skills related to employability, self-advocacy, and agency. Ideally, these instructor preparation programs will be competency-based so that student teachers can learn and demonstrate needed competencies at their own pace and gain credit for what they already know based on their prior learning and work experiences. Ideally, these newly trained instructors would adopt the same model for assessing the competencies and readiness of students they teach in Big Blur institutions.

Finally, programs that allow industry professionals to transition into teaching should be commonplace and be thoughtfully designed to provide those professionals with the pedagogical instruction they need to be effective instructors. These established routes into Big Blur instruction should provide pathways for industry professionals into the teaching profession.

Policy Recommendations

- **Create a statewide design process for Big Blur instructor credentialing.** States moving toward a Big Blur system should consider using the capabilities of their existing K-12 and higher education infrastructures in designing educator preparation programs that meet the developmental, college, and career readiness needs of young adults. This could involve the following actions:
 - **Creating a task force** of educator preparation program staff members, K-12 instructors, college faculty members, and industry professionals who have become instructors, and ask it to provide a report on model program design and any policy changes necessary to facilitate that design.
 - **Running a competitive grant competition process among the state's educator preparation programs** to design new programs based on specific parameters, and selecting the most competitive applicant to serve as a pilot implementation site. A state does not need to be explicitly creating Big Blur institutions to implement this recommendation. It could instead just begin to transform its education systems by redesigning high school instruction with a greater college and career focus.
- **Expand the use of apprenticeships into Big Blur instruction.** Teacher apprenticeship models have had success in expanding the recruitment and retention of instructors. These models should be incentivized and expanded by states nationwide. States should also consider piloting the use of this model to help existing K-12 teachers and community college professors develop new skills essential to the Big Blur system, such as industry-based experience and pedagogical training.
- **Review and enhance credentialing pathways for industry professionals and further support professionals' transition to teaching.** States should work with their educator preparation programs to review and enhance their teacher credentialing pathways for industry professionals. Such efforts should balance the need to ensure that those professionals have the pedagogical instruction to succeed in the classroom and make teaching a compelling option for industry professionals. They should also provide support for those professionals after their transitions into the teaching workforce. In addition, states should do more to publicize the availability of these programs to professionals who are seeking alternative career paths outside of their industries.¹⁹ Paired with other recommendations included in this brief around incentives, a robust recruitment effort could lead to increased numbers of professionals transitioning into the teaching workforce.

EXAMPLE

University of Texas at Austin OnRamps

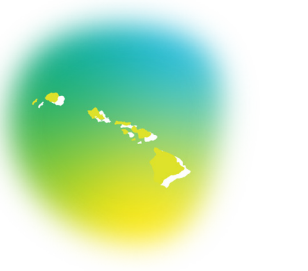


The University of Texas at Austin's OnRamps initiative is a thoughtfully designed program in which the university partners with over 400 high schools across the state to deliver dual enrollment and career and technical education (CTE) course experiences for students.²⁰ The initiative was developed in response to a significant rise in dual credit programs in Texas and a lack of available qualified teachers who could instruct dual credit courses. Participating high school teachers and college faculty members receive professional development support from OnRamps that is focused on pedagogical skills and content.

The professional development program for high school teachers focuses on helping them partner with the college instructor, who is the instructor of record for the postsecondary content of the dual enrollment course. The goal is to enable them to elevate the learning experiences of the students in these dual enrollment courses, and to ensure that the course experience meets postsecondary requirements. High school teachers and college faculty members who have participated in OnRamps and the professional development program have said that both groups of educators learned from each other. OnRamps demonstrates the power and potential of drawing lessons from the best of K-12 instruction and the best of higher education instruction to provide students with an experience that supports strong outcomes.

EXAMPLE

Leeward Community College, Hawaii



Leeward Community College in Hawaii offers the Alternative Certification for CTE Licensure Program, designed to support industry professionals in getting fully licensed to teach in K-12 classrooms in that state.²¹ These professionals must have either a bachelor's degree and three years of experience in their career field or an associate's degree and five years of experience to be eligible to participate. Over the course of three or four semesters, the industry professionals take three foundational pedagogy courses in classroom management, inclusion, and educational psychology. That is followed by a semester of classroom observation and participation, and then a full-time semester of student teaching. Upon their successful completion of the course, participants are recommended for licensure by the Hawaii Teachers Standards Board. Programs like Leeward's offer important lessons on how to expand pathways into teaching for industry professionals.



POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Incentives

Incentivize Instructors to Embrace the Big Blur

As explained above, instructor credentialing for dual enrollment is not sufficient to reach the vision of the Big Blur. However, the mechanisms in dual enrollment that incentivize teachers to step outside of traditional methods of instruction can be adapted to support the realization of the Big Blur. This is particularly important as new credentialing routes for teachers are created that embed the vision of the Big Blur directly into a teacher preparation model for the instruction of students in grades 11-14.

Finding ways to improve teacher pay and conditions is also the right thing to do to help grow the teacher workforce. Developing a stronger career ladder with opportunities for better pay and benefits appropriately acknowledges the value of the important work teachers do and helps make the teaching profession more attractive.

We are already starting to see incremental moves in this direction, and state policymakers interested in implementing the vision of the Big Blur should continue to foster this trend through state policies and guidance. For example, collective bargaining for high school teachers is increasingly including provisions related to teaching dual enrollment courses, and an increasing number of contracts are including financial compensation for providing these additional course experiences to students.²²

Policy Recommendations

- **Create state-endorsed compensation structures that reward teachers for engaging in forms of instruction that align with the Big Blur vision.** States should enact policies to provide additional compensation to instructors, either through state funding or state requirements (or encouragements) related to the use of local secondary or postsecondary funding. This can include the following approaches:
 - **Scholarships** for instructors to receive additional credentials that will allow them to teach grades 11-14, which could include subject-specific mastery for K-12 instructors to teach postsecondary content and pedagogical mastery for college instructors to be able to teach in K-12
 - **Additional compensation** through incentive structures for those instructors who teach students in grades 11-14 in alignment with the vision of the Big Blur
 - **Loan forgiveness** incentives for teachers who enter the teaching profession and seek appropriate credentials and opportunities to teach students in grades 11-14

- **Incentivize ongoing professional development for instructors.** States should deploy incentive mechanisms that provide professional development opportunities to instructors who engage in forms of instruction that align with the Big Blur vision, thus enabling them to remain up to date on industry certifications and credentials relevant to the discipline they are teaching.



EXAMPLE

Indiana Encourages Increased Teacher Pay for Dual Enrollment



Teacher pay is set at the district level in Indiana, which has specifically authorized school districts to offer increased incentives for high school teachers to teach dual credit courses upon their completion of the appropriate postgraduate degree. The statute authorizes districts to “provide a supplemental payment to a teacher in excess of the salary specified in the school corporation’s compensation plan” if the educator “has earned a master’s degree from an accredited postsecondary educational institution in a content area directly related to the subject matter” of a dual credit course the instructor is teaching.²³ This allows high schools to incentivize teachers to pursue credentials that will enable them to improve students’ college and career readiness. This statute could easily be adapted to offer incentives for teachers to pursue other skills or credentials that would support the Big Blur’s vision of helping students earn a credential of value and enter the workforce.





POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Capacity

Invest in Strategic Staffing Models

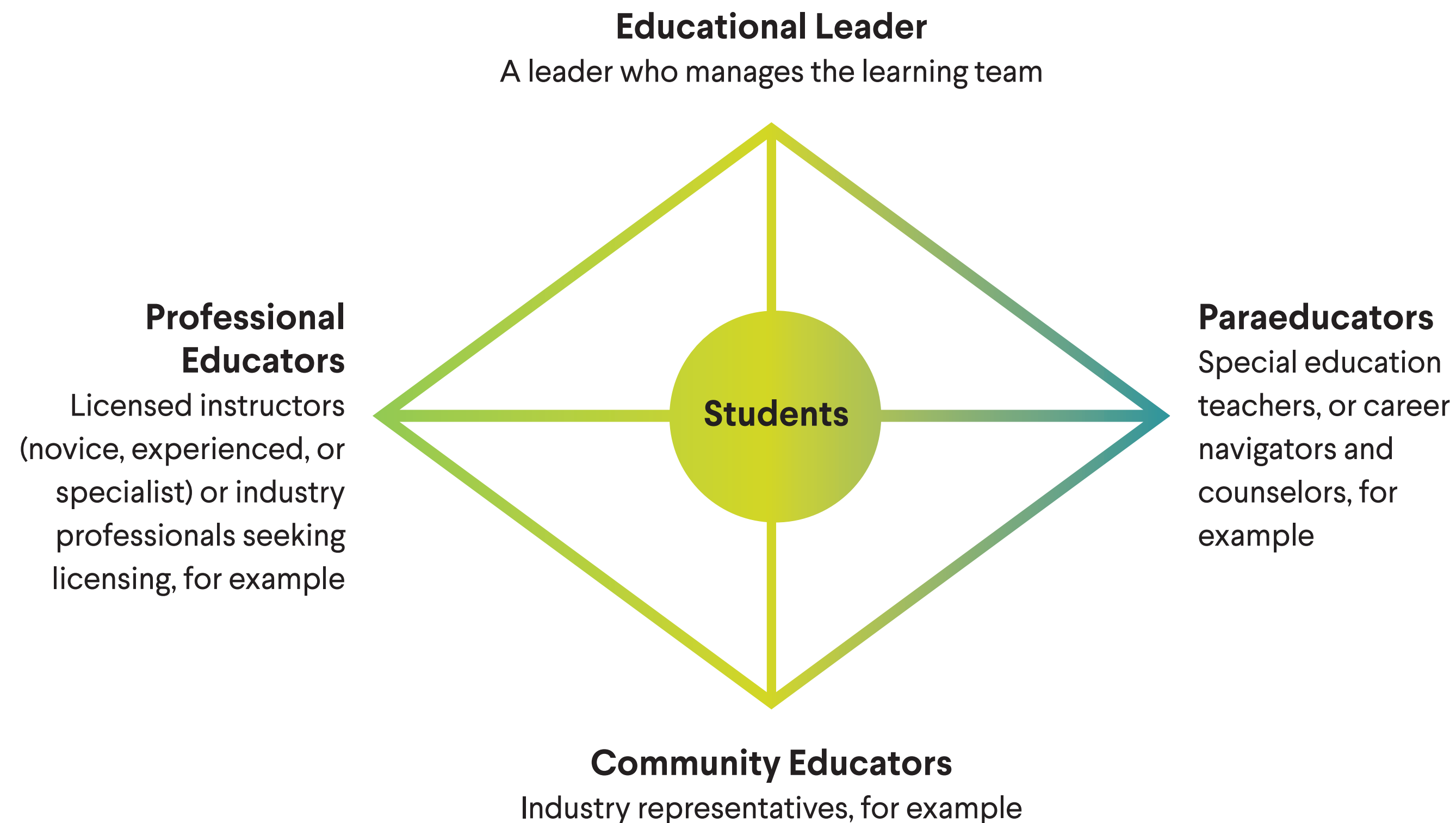
Big Blur learning environments should not look like the classrooms of most of today's high schools or community colleges. To build a Big Blur system, create effective learning environments, and foster a strong instructor workforce, it is essential to deploy new instructor staffing models.²⁴

There is an increasing movement, led by groups like Arizona State University's Next Education Workforce and the Coalition to Reimagine the Teaching Role, to adopt shared staffing and team-based models for instruction in K-12 settings.²⁵ Early results from these programs indicate that students learn better, instructors are happier, and more instructors are retained year on year.²⁶

These models also facilitate many of the innovations called for in the Big Blur vision. A team-based model would allow industry professionals to enter the classroom more quickly while they continue to become trained educators; create more opportunities for business and industry to enter the classroom as part of the learning teams; and bring counseling, advising, and career navigation services directly into the classroom.

Leveraging strategic staffing models and innovations also addresses the reality that Big Blur instructors have many roles and responsibilities in shepherding students through their education, college, and career journeys. Diversifying some of these roles across instructional teams creates additional capacity to provide students with all of the services we know they need to succeed in college and career and thrive in these new Big Blur institutions.

Learning Team Example in the Big Blur



This graphic has been adapted from the [Arizona State University Next Education Workforce](#) visual for instructor teams, with additional context to show how the concept could work within the Big Blur.

Policy Recommendations

- **Deploy strategic staffing models.** States should invest in implementing and scaling the use of strategic staffing models in high schools and pilot their use in community college settings to create more incentives for instructors to remain in the workforce. These models should include incentivizing the participation of industry professionals, college and career navigators, and people in other positions envisioned in the Big Blur as part of the learning team, to ensure that students' college and career needs are appropriately addressed.

EXAMPLE

Washington's I-BEST



The state of Washington's Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST) is an innovative program pioneered by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to deploy team teaching to improve the learning and outcomes of students enrolled in adult education.²⁷ Washington colleges receive additional enrollment aid for I-BEST students (1.75 times the normal student rate) and federal adult education funding.²⁸ The program is characterized by instructional teams of three who engage directly with students in the classroom; an instructor who specializes in adult education and basic skills in reading, math, or English; an instructor who specializes in the CTE content of the class being taught; and a career navigator who supports the students directly in understanding how what they are learning can support their career journeys. The navigator advocates for adult education students outside the classroom and connects them to resources both on campus and in the community. The I-BEST model ensures a holistic approach to meeting students' educational and career needs.

The instructional team is calibrated to provide students with the most effective instruction right in the classroom and draw direct relevance from it to their future career experiences. The instructors co-design and co-deliver courses to appropriately contextualize basic skills instruction so that students can master the technical education content. The navigator on the team has significantly more direct interaction with students than someone in the traditional counselor role would in either a high school or a college.

While I-BEST was created for adult education students, it shows the promise and potential of a model that could be applied to younger students in high school or community college settings. It achieves the vision of the Big Blur by providing an innovative instructional setting that offers a more comprehensive learning environment for students, as well as additional direct services in the classroom environment, such as career navigation. Additionally, it blends and braids state and federal funding across multiple education systems to focus on student success and student outcomes.



EXAMPLE

The Sturm Collaboration Campus at Arapahoe Community College in Colorado



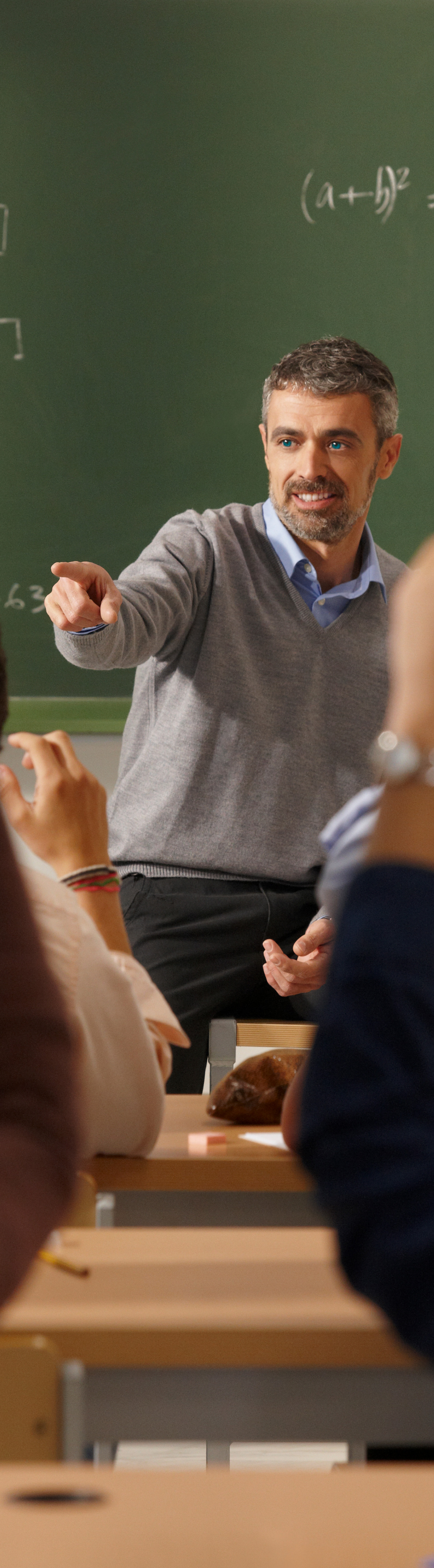
Within the existing K-12 and higher education instructor credentialing systems, school districts and institutions of higher education have already begun to think creatively about how to improve collaboration between the different instructors and begin intentionally hiring and training instructors to teach both high school and community college students. One such initiative is the Sturm Collaboration Campus, a partnership between Arapahoe Community College, the Douglas County School District, and the Colorado State University (CSU) system. The initiative provides a seamless set of programming for students, from high school through completion of a bachelor's degree, that builds in career exposure and work-based learning experiences.²⁹

Arapahoe Community College has also been working on co-hiring instructors from the school district who can teach high school, dual enrollment, and community college courses, either in the schools or on the college campus.

These roles include the following:

- A concurrent enrollment specialist, who moves between Douglas County School District high schools and Sturm to support dually enrolled students and help align courses to pathways that will transfer to Arapahoe Community College and/or CSU
- Career navigators, hired by Sturm, who do an in-depth intake with students, including a career assessment; walk them through the My Colorado Journey work, education, and support services tool; and align their skills and goals with career opportunities
- School district navigators, who work for the school district but are housed at Sturm to work closely with both the career navigators and the concurrent enrollment specialist





Conclusion

The ideas and concepts presented by the Big Blur and described in this brief are transformational and significantly rethink how we educate and prepare young adults for the world of work. Creating a new system to serve these young adults ages 16–20 will have significant implications for the instructors who will staff the institutions in that system. The new system envisioned in the Big Blur aims to provide more supports to instructors and better compensate them, and provide students with a more enriching and relevant learning environment than the existing high school and community college systems offer. There are important questions that need further exploration as we continue to develop our understanding of cognitive science and the needs of this age group, the appropriate compensation structure for instructors, and the ways in which some collective bargaining units would need to evolve.

There are many ways that transforming grades 11–14 into the Big Blur model we envision will support the education and career needs of young adults. But there are many reasons— independent of a state’s decision about undertaking a full systems transformation—why the recommendations included

here should be appealing to state policymakers. The needs of the modern workforce require a thriving cohort of high school and community college instructors who can provide students with the services they need. The recommendations in this brief will help states ensure that young adults are receiving the instruction, skills training, and career planning assistance that they need in order to thrive.

This brief is designed to start a conversation about how to ensure that young adults ages 16–20 receive the highest-quality instruction in as many appropriate learning environments as possible. JFF invites you to join us as we continue to consider these issues and chart a path forward.

The Big Blur aims to provide more supports to instructors and provide students with a more enriching and relevant learning environment.

Endnotes

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