

DATE: June 8, 2018

TO: Chief Local Elected Officials
Local Workforce Development Board Chairs
Local Workforce Development Boards
Local Workforce Development Board Staff

FROM: Erin E. Risley-Baird, Executive Director, Office of Workforce Development

RE: Career Pathways Guidance

PURPOSE: To provide guidance to workforce development partners, including education and training institutions, non-profits, government agencies, and other partners, regarding the Governor’s Council for Workforce and Economic Development’s vision for the creation and sustainability of a statewide career pathways system.

BACKGROUND: The Governor’s Council for Workforce and Economic Development (GCWED) has adopted and prioritized the strategies of the Oklahoma Works initiative, which is a statewide initiative designed to increase the wealth of all Oklahomans through facilitating quality employment for workers and ready availability of highly skilled talent for business and industry. The Oklahoma Works initiative represents a strategic partnership between the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development, Workforce Development Boards, education and training institutions, state agencies, business and industry partners, economic development organizations, and others across the state working in collaboration to prepare all Oklahomans with the skills they need for in-demand, high-wage jobs.

Oklahoma must increase the education and training attainment levels of our workforce. The state is facing a 23 percentage point skills gap between the credentials Oklahoma’s current workforce possesses and what the state’s future economy will require to meet employer demand. Data projections indicate the greatest need will be in middle skill jobs, or those positions that require an Associate’s degree, certificate or professional credential. To close the skills gaps, Oklahoma established a statewide goal, known as Launch Oklahoma, to increase the number of workers with education or training beyond high school to 70 percent by 2025 so that businesses have the current and future talent pipeline they so desperately need.

Career pathways, including work-based learning and employability skills, are a vital component needed to increase education and training attainment to close employer skill gaps. Businesses indicate two of the greatest workforce challenges they face are finding people with the right skills and competencies to match job openings and equipping them with the employability skills (soft skills) necessary to prevent turnover. Creating a cohesive, statewide system of career pathways will allow more Oklahomans access and exposure to high-wage, high-demand occupations to fill the talent pipeline required to meet employer requirements, create more opportunities for students to apply skills in real-world settings, increase access for more Oklahomans to training and education programs regardless of current attainment levels, and engage Oklahoma businesses in the process.

In addition to meeting the goals of the larger Oklahoma Works initiative, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires the GCWED to support the use of career pathways and establishes

career pathways as a required element of Title I youth service strategies and a state leadership activity under Title II. WIOA also requires Local Workforce Development Boards to lead efforts to develop and implement career pathways and include descriptions in local plans.

MESSAGE: The following guidance is intended to help workforce partners build and implement local, regional, and state career pathways that are aligned to business and industry needs. It is intended to inform the work of other state agencies, however it is by no means an exclusive or exhaustive document and should be supplemented with ongoing conversations with stakeholders. The guidance is centered on the creation and sustainability of a statewide career pathways system that shapes career pathways through policies and procedures.

Career Pathways Vision

Career pathways are an essential component of creating a strong, aligned talent pipeline that fulfills the skills requirements of Oklahoma businesses. Career pathways address the entire continuum of life-long learning, from Pre-K through career, entry-level jobs through high-skilled positions. Our vision is that by 2025:

- Career pathway programs will be aligned to Oklahoma Works' 100 Critical Occupations and/or to the Wealth Generating Driver and Complementary Economic Systems
- All middle and high school students will have a completed Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP)¹
- At least 20,000 Oklahomans will be involved in high-quality work-based learning
- 70 percent of Oklahoma's workforce will have postsecondary education or training

Career Pathway Description

A career pathway means a combination of relevant, rigorous and high-quality education, training, and supportive services that aligns both vertically and horizontally across Secondary Education, Adult Basic Education, Workforce Training and Development, Career and Technical Education, and Postsecondary Education systems, pathways, and programs. High quality, sustainable pathways are driven by labor market data and informed by business and industry. These pathways are made up of multiple entry and exit points and incorporate collaborative partnerships with education, training, workforce development, economic development, social/supportive services, community-based organizations, and other key stakeholders as shown in Figure A. Successful career pathways facilitate the movement of individuals along a continuum of education and training, building individuals' skills and allowing for the advancement in an occupational field, industry, or sector.

Career Pathway: The term "career pathway," as defined by WIOA, means a combination of rigorous and high quality education, training, and other services that—

- A. aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;
- B. prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the National Apprenticeship Act;

¹ An ICAP uses a multi-year process to guide students as they explore their career and academic opportunities using career clusters, career pathways, and programs of study. An ICAP identifies student interests, skills, secondary/postsecondary coursework, certificates, credentials, degrees and workforce experiences that lead to a meaningful program of study that charts the progress needed to prepare students for college and career.

- C. includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals;
- D. includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- E. organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;
- F. enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
- G. helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

Career Pathways Components

The following bullets are provided to offer additional clarity to items A-G above.

A. aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;

High-quality, sustainable career pathways should:

- Use labor market data to design career pathway programs that meet the needs of employers in local, regional and state economies.
- Involve input and feedback from employers who are meaningfully engaged at every stage of pathway development (e.g. interactive engagement, employers in leadership role, etc.).
- Identify the degrees, certificates, industry-recognized professional credentials, and licenses that state, regional, and local employers require and develop programs and career pathways leading to them.

B. prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the National Apprenticeship Act;

High-quality, sustainable career pathways should:

- Enable lifelong learning that ensures youth and adult participants can gain entry to and advance, as desired, through successive education and training programs, leading to stackable credentials and degrees in a given occupational cluster.
- Lead to jobs in increasingly high-skill, high-wage, and/or high-demand industries, including jobs in Oklahoma’s Driver and Complementary Economic Systems² and Critical Occupations³.
- Ensure access and appropriate services for the targeted populations included in the State of Oklahoma Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan and Launch Oklahoma Strategic Plan.⁴

² Through a comprehensive quantitative analysis of 72 variables and over 48,000 data points, Oklahoma has identified nine driver and complementary economic systems representing the most prominent industries in terms of wealth generation and growth potential. Driver Ecosystems drive wealth generation in Oklahoma and include: Aerospace and Defense; Agriculture and Biosciences; Energy; Information and Financial Systems; and Transportation and Distribution. Complementary Ecosystems help to expand wealth in the economy. Provide the infrastructure and services to support the driver systems in the state and include: Construction; Health Care; Education; and Creative Industries.

³ Oklahoma’s Critical Occupations represent the most pressing needs in each of Oklahoma’s Driver and Complementary Economic Systems necessary for the state’s continued growth and economic prosperity.

⁴ Priority populations identified in the State of Oklahoma Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan are: Long-term unemployed; Low-income adults; Low literacy adults, including those without a high school

C. includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual's education and career goals;

High-quality, sustainable career pathways should:

- Ensure participants have access to career exposure, career exploration, college and/or career-ready standards, work-based learning, academic advising, support with transitions through the pathway, and comprehensive individualized support services, such as, but not limited to, child care, transportation, and financial aid (where appropriate).
- Involve partnerships among K-12, postsecondary educational institutions, workforce training and development agencies, public and private employers, workforce boards, human services providers, and other partners to ensure participant access to the above services.

D. includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;

High-quality, sustainable career pathways should:

- Include career-focused instruction that integrates academic and technical content with employability skills, which are skills needed for success in education, training, career, and life.
- Offer opportunities for work-based learning experiences.
- Offer job placement assistant services that are tailored to participant needs at different points along the pathway.

E. organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;

High-quality, sustainable career pathways should:

- Offer quality, non-duplicative training, coursework, assignments, and assessments to accelerate progress, maximize credit and credential attainment, and increase student success. This includes the use of tools such as Prior Learning Assessments (PLAs), Portfolios, Competency Assessments, Institutional Cooperative Agreements, as appropriate.
- Incorporate innovations in instruction and program design to help students increase education and training attainment.
- Encourage postsecondary opportunities in high school, including collegiate level concurrent or CTE dual enrollment, AP courses, certificate/credential programs, work-based learning, and other early college credit opportunities that support progression through the pathway.
- Offer participant-focused education and training that incorporates flexible class formats, locations, and times that makes learning accessible and achievable for all populations. Strategies include, but are not limited to: Virtual/Online courses; Fast-track courses; Non-traditional course hours (e.g. nights, weekends); and other flexible learning options.

diploma; Low-skilled adults; Individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities; Those receiving public assistance; Out-of-school youth; Veterans; Migrant and seasonal farm workers; Re-entry individuals (ex-offenders); English Language Learners; Older individuals; Homeless individuals; Single parents; Youth in the foster system or who have aged out; Displaced homemakers; Veterans with disabilities; Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Additional populations identified through the Launch Oklahoma Strategic Plan include; rural populations; Hispanics and African Americans.

F. enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential;

High-quality, sustainable career pathways should:

- Create partnerships between programs that serve youth and adults of all skill levels to ensure that participants can have the opportunity to earn a recognized postsecondary degree, certificate or credential.
- Enable participants to gain entry to or advance within a given sector or occupational cluster, facilitate efficient transitions to continuing education, and incorporate stackable and portable industry-recognized credentials or higher education certificates and/or degrees.
- Facilitate co-enrollment in programs administered by the WIOA Core Partners⁵ and Oklahoma Works Agency Partners (education, commerce, health, veterans, human services, and others) when appropriate (e.g. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T), etc.).

G. helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

High-quality, sustainable career pathways should:

- Involve partnerships with employers to support participant educational and career advancement through on-the-job training, customized training, corporate training, incumbent worker training, and other work-based training strategies.
- Overcome barriers to entry to ensure that participants with diverse backgrounds and experience can enroll and succeed in a pathway.

An effective and efficient career pathway will also commit to equity for all participants and potential participants and continuous improvement. To ensure that is possible, the system will:

- Ensure a plan to define and assess overall pathway success, measures of progress toward goals, pathway outcomes, opportunities for improvement, and a mechanism for updating the pathway and associated strategies as needed.
- Collect, share, and use evidence to identify and eliminate barriers to participant access and success.
- Include shared qualitative and quantitative evaluation of participant outcomes, with a focus on equity of access and services across participant groups, to inform the improvement of all programs within the pathway as well as the pathway itself.
- Disaggregate program-level and participant-level data to identify inequities in performance among participant groups and improve the outcomes of different participant groups.
- Include shared qualitative and quantitative evaluation of effectiveness in serving employers in order to inform strategies for improvement.

Additional Career Pathways Definitions:

Career Clusters: Groups of occupations and industries that share a set of foundational knowledge and skills. There are 16 nationally recognized career clusters with multiple career pathways. As a student progresses from elementary through high school and beyond, career clusters serve as a guide to assist students and families with course selection and opportunities for students beyond the school day.

⁵ WIOA Core Partners include: Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, and Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education.

Career Exposure: Exposure to and awareness of high-skill, high-demand, and high-wage occupations aligned to Oklahoma’s Driver and Complementary Economic Systems and Critical Occupations. Exposure should include access to labor market data, including projections associated with job growth, wages, required credentials, and industry sectors.

Career Exploration: Process in which individual chooses a college or CTE educational path or training or a job which fits their interests, skills and abilities.

Career Readiness: Career readiness is the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare individuals for successful entry into and progression within a career, industry, or sector.

Credential⁶: Either a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. Recognized postsecondary credentials include credentials consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State or Federal government, or a college certificate, associate or baccalaureate degree, as well as graduate degrees. Recognized postsecondary credentials are those awarded in recognition of an individual’s attainment of measurable college certificate or degree, or technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an industry/occupation. These technical or industry/occupational skills generally are based on standards developed or endorsed by employers or industry associations.

Digital Badge: A digital badge is an industry-validated or employer-validated indicator of competency, accomplishment, skill, or quality that can be earned in many learning environments, including through traditional classroom settings and virtual online platforms.

Employability Skills⁷: Often called soft skills, employability skills include Personal Skills (integrity, initiative, dependability/reliability, adaptability, professionalism), People Skills (teamwork, communication, respect), Workplace Skills (planning and organization, problem solving, decision making, business fundamentals, customer focus, working with tools and technology), and Applied Knowledge (reading, writing, mathematics, science, technology, critical thinking). These skills are interconnected to allow employers to look at the full scope of what skills are necessary in all major economic sectors. Attainment of these business-defined skills prepares individuals for careers and for further education and training.

Individual Career Academic Planning: An Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP) uses a multi-year process to guide students as they explore their own career and academic opportunities using career clusters, career pathways and programs of study. An ICAP identifies student interests, skills, secondary/postsecondary coursework, certificates, credentials, degrees and workforce experiences that lead to a meaningful program of study that charts the progress needed to prepare students for college and career.

⁶ USDOL TEGL 10-6

⁷ National Network of Business and Industry Associations. (2014). Common employability skills: A foundation for success in the workplace: The skills all employees need, no matter where they work.

https://businessroundtable.org/sites/default/files/Common%20Employability_asingle_fm.pdf

Industry-Aligned Credential: Credentials whose standards are aligned to industry-recognized standards.

Industry-Endorsed Credential: Credentials whose standards are aligned to and endorsed by industry.

Industry-Recognized Credential⁸: An industry-recognized credential is one that either is developed and offered by, or endorsed by a nationally-recognized industry association or organization representing a sizeable portion of the industry sector, or a credential that is sought or accepted by companies within the industry sector for purposes of hiring or recruitment which may include credentials from vendors of certain products.

Job Shadow: Job Shadowing is when a participant follows an employee at a firm for one or more days to learn about a particular occupation or industry. One-on-one time is spent with employees for the participant to observe the daily routine of the employee(s). The opportunity should be made available to the participant to understand the daily duties and activities, ask questions, identify career interest, become aware of the technical and academic skills needed to enter the specific career, develop communication skills, and apply connection between academic classroom work and their career goals. Job shadowing is intended to explore a range of careers and specific career objectives to select an appropriate career pathway.

On-the-Job Training (OJT): On-the Job Training (OJT) means employee training in the public, non-profit, or private sector that is given to a paid employee while he or she is engaged in productive work and that provides knowledge and skills essential to the full and adequate performance on the job. Formal OJT programs are provided under a contract with an employer or registered apprenticeship program sponsor and OJT employees must be supervised daily by the employee sponsor/employer. Informal OJT programs are offered by the employer as part of the companies' skills training program.

Portable Credential: Credentials vetted and endorsed by employers and education/training institutions throughout the state and the country and are independently verified or accredited. These credentials are portable in that they are recognized and accepted within an industry or program of study and can be built upon to allow individuals to attain higher level certificates, credentials, or degrees. A credential is considered portable when it is recognized and accepted as verifying the qualifications of an individual in other settings - either in other geographic areas, at other educational institutions, or by other industries or employing companies.⁹

Programs of Study: Programs of Study are sequences of courses that follow a logical progression of secondary and postsecondary components that are connected to each career pathway. Programs of study include opportunities to earn college credit, earn an industry-recognized credential or certificate and/or an associate or baccalaureate degree. Programs of study can also include participation in formal work-based learning options.

Stackable Credential: a stackable credential is an industry-recognized credential offered by a certificate or other non-degree program, or a third party certification or occupational license, which articulates toward a higher level certificate or associates degree in the same occupational area. A credential is considered stackable when it is part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to

⁸ USDOL TEGL 15-10

⁹ USDOL TEGL 15-10

build up an individual's qualifications and help them to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs.¹⁰ The stackable credential may be offered by an institution of higher education or another type of organization, so long as the credential articulates to a higher level certificate or associate degree offered by state-recognized institutions of higher education.

Work-Based Learning¹¹: The GCWED defines a work-based learning activity as a planned, structured learning experience that provides Oklahomans with real-life or simulated work experiences where they can develop and apply academic, technical, and essential skills; and contributes to the achievement of their postsecondary and employment goal(s). The GCWED is employing a flexible definition of work-based learning, encompassing the activities below:

- **Apprenticeship:** Highly-formal job training experience that involves studying with a master of the trade or experienced mentor on the job. Registered Apprenticeships refer to those programs which are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Registered Apprenticeship programs are a written plan designed to move an apprentice from a low or no skill entry-level position to full occupational proficiency. Registered apprenticeship is an employer-driven, “earn while you learn” model that combines on-the-job training with related technical instruction, resulting in an industry-recognized national certification upon completion. Apprenticeships are full-time, paid positions that provide specialized training in specific occupational skills. Apprentices receive on-the-job training (OJT) from an experienced mentor at the job site that is supplemented by related technical instruction. DOL recommends a minimum of 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and 144 hours of related technical instruction per year of an apprenticeship.
- **Internship:** A position for a student or trainee to work in an organization for a limited duration, sometimes without pay, to gain work experience, satisfy requirements for a credential, and/or gain course credit. An internship may be arranged within the private for-profit sector, the non-profit sector, or the public sector. For youth internships where students are receiving K-12 academic credit, see guidelines set by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.¹²
- **Job Shadow:** *See definition above.*
- **Pre-Apprenticeship:** A pre-apprenticeship is a program designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program. Pre-apprenticeship models allow individuals to master essential basic skills and then individuals are directly accepted into the apprenticeship program, often receiving credit for prior experience. Basic essential skills could include training in math, literacy, communication, and other pre-vocational and vocational skills that are essential for future success in a Registered Apprenticeship program. Through a variety of unique designs and approaches, pre-apprenticeship programs can be adapted to meet the needs of differing populations being trained, the various employers and sponsors they serve, and specific opportunities within the local labor market. Pre-apprenticeships have formal relationships with one or more Registered Apprenticeship programs. Expectations for Registered Apprenticeship programs are defined in the U.S. Department of Labor's Standards of Apprenticeship which are customized to each employing program sponsor. All Registered Apprenticeship programs must meet parameters established under the National Apprenticeship Act that are designed to protect the welfare of the apprentice.¹³

¹⁰ USDOL TEGL 15-10

¹¹ See Work-Based Learning Guidance Document for additional information and definitions.

¹² See <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/>.

¹³ See the U.S. Department of Labor's “What is Apprenticeship” page for additional information.
<https://www.doleta.gov/OA/apprenticeship.cfm>

Career Pathways Resources:

Career One Stop: Learn about careers, find career information, and locate career resources and advice. Explore nearly 1,000 occupations and careers at <https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/explore-careers.aspx>.

Express Personnel Job Genius: An online educational program designed to teach young adults how to successfully enter the workforce. Visit <https://www.expresspros.com/JobGenius/>.

Launch Oklahoma: Online hub to link Oklahomans to career exploration websites, job search and resume resources, and education and training programs aligned to Oklahoma's Critical Occupations. Visit www.launchoklahoma.org.

New Skills for Youth (NSFY): website serves as a hub of resources and information on career awareness, exploration, and planning including career pathways toolkits, videos, archived webinars, summit presentations, information briefs and best practices that connect educators, businesses, and other partners. Visit <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/new-skills-youth>.

OKCareerGuide: This comprehensive portal provides free college planning and preparation information and tools for students, parents, and educators. Features include a scholarship program that notifies users when awards become available, ACT and SAT test prep, career exploration and planning tools, and detailed profiles of public and independent colleges and universities. Users can also access information about federal and state financial aid and an online application for the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program. OKcollegestart.org also offers a companion site for Oklahoma counselors and teachers allowing them to track student progress and send and receive electronic transcripts to institutions throughout the United States. Visit <https://okcareerguide.kuder.com/landing-page>.

OKCollegeStart: An online tool available to educators, parents, students and adults to assist in planning education and training paths. Access surveys and assessments that help users discover career options, explore career clusters, create a plan of study, create a portfolio, and send an electronic transcript to institutions of interest. The system includes free test prep courses for ACT, SAT, and GRE and a way to apply for online admission to participating colleges. Students explore postsecondary courses and schools including programs and majors. In addition, students find scholarships and use the financial aid calculator as they find their path to the future. Visit <https://www.okcollegestart.org/>.

OKJobMatch: Online system available to all Oklahomans to browse job listings, post resumes, and match with employers looking to hire. OKJobMatch is a one-stop-shop for information about education and training for in-demand jobs, links to Oklahoma Works One-Stop Centers, and connections to job hunting resources like upcoming hiring events. Visit <https://okjobmatch.com>.

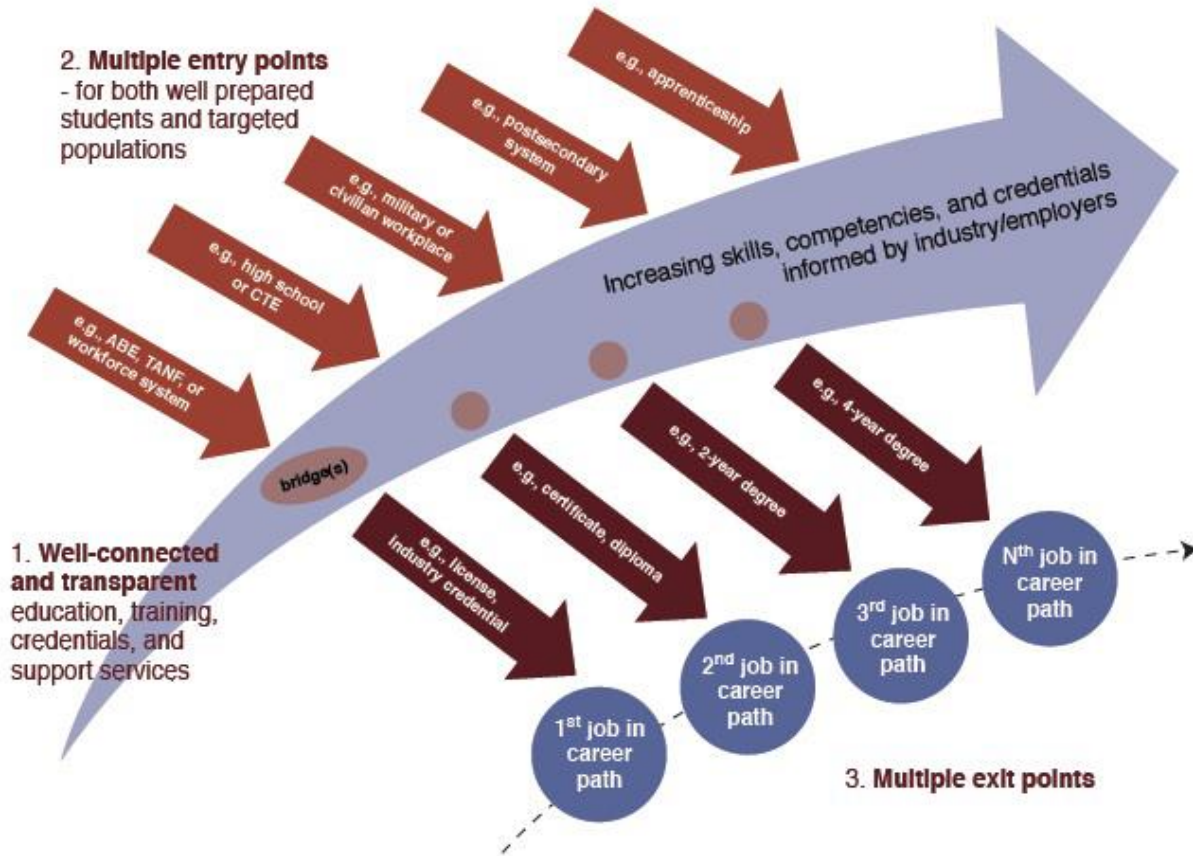
Oklahoma EDGE: The OSDE online Learning Community is a one-stop interactive learning platform that engages students, parents, educators, business, and the community with videos, infographics, and careers in the classroom to create partnerships with business and education for meaningful work-based learning experiences. This platform communicates to parents and students about careers in high-demand, high-skilled areas. Visit <https://osde.nextthought.com/app/>.



Oklahoma Works: Oklahoma Works website serves as a hub to link all Oklahomans to workforce development, education, training, and job search resources and data. Visit <https://oklahomaworks.gov/>.

INQUIRIES: If you have any questions about this issuance, please contact the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development. Contact information can be found at <http://www.oklahomaworks.gov/about/>.

FIGURE A: Essential Features of a Career Pathways System



Source: Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)