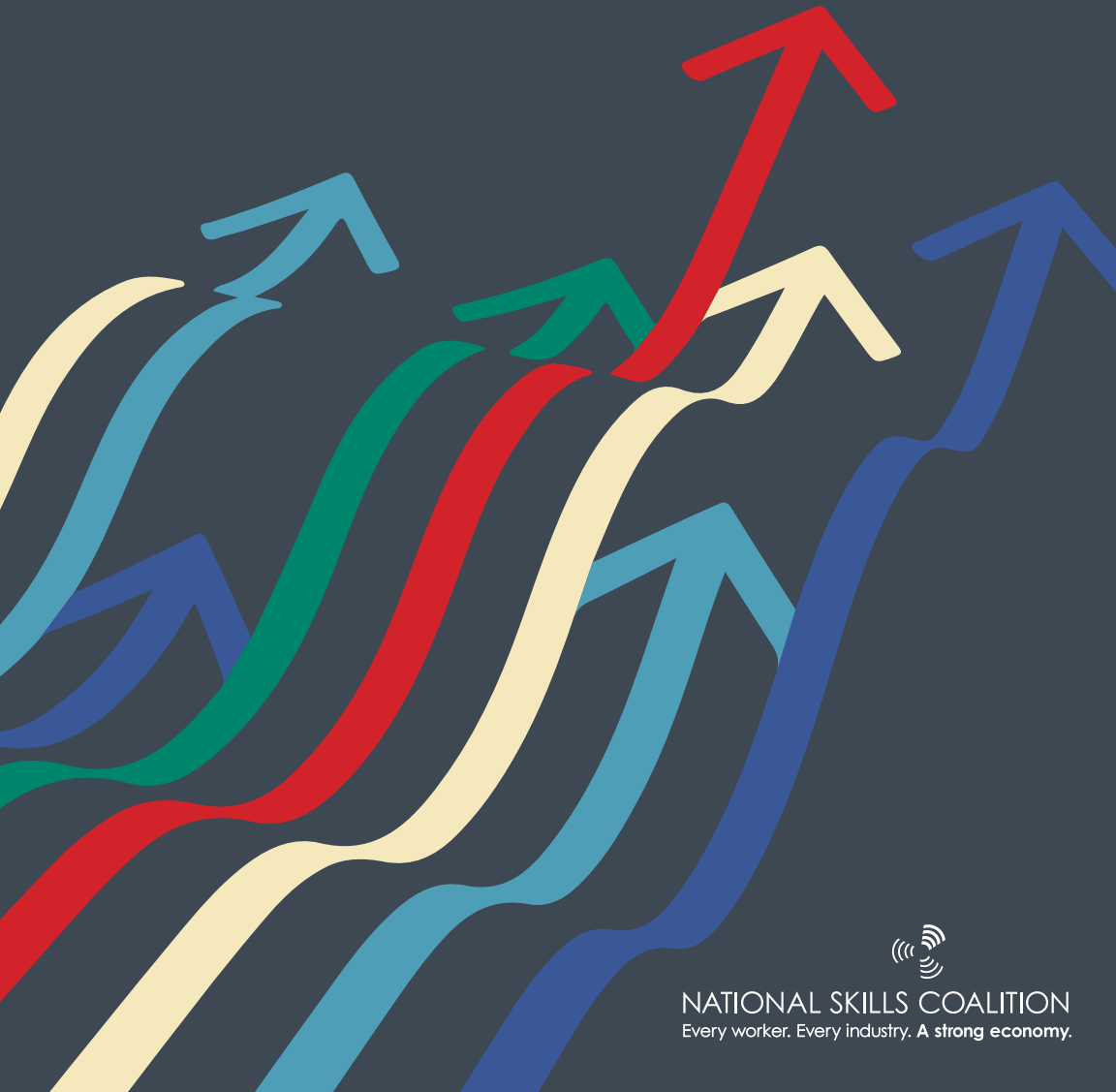


THE ROADMAP FOR RACIAL EQUITY

An imperative for workforce
development advocates





NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

To our partners,

National Skills Coalition is proud to present our report, *The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An imperative for workforce development advocates*. We are members of a coalition working toward a vision of America that grows its economy so that every worker and every industry has the skills to compete and prosper. As part of our efforts to fulfill our mission, we submit this publication as our first effort at laying out the pervasive issues of racism and exclusion in the workforce and education systems, as well as potential solutions for remedying these persistent problems. National Skills Coalition recognizes that the face of America's population and workforce is changing, and we commit with this first step to infuse racial equity into all aspects of our policy and advocacy work.

While it covers a wide breadth of topics, *The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An imperative for workforce development advocates* is not an exhaustive representation of the struggles experienced by racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants — nor is it meant to be when written from a stringent workforce policy lens.

To be clear, National Skills Coalition is of firm belief that workforce development is not the sole answer to racial and ethnic inequities or disparities. Rather, workforce training and education are crucial tactics in addressing employment, income, and wealth disparities that preclude too many Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, Native, and certain Asian American workers from economic and family security. It is our hope that our recommendations for advancing racial equity within state and federal workforce policies align with and supplement broader efforts in both the public and private sectors to achieve racial and economic equity.

We hope the analyses, themes, and policy recommendations within this report resonate with you just as we hope that they faithfully represent the needs and experiences of the workers for whom we advocate. This publication and initial foray into a broad, new policy arena will not be perfect; we are not the experts. We can only hope as workforce development policy advocates that this work stimulates action and further discussion within our sphere of influence to advance the larger cause of racial equity. Thank you for your attention to this publication.

Respectfully,
National Skills Coalition

The authors of this report are Melissa Johnson, Molly Bashay, and Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, National Skills Coalition. Michael Richardson and Brooke DeRenzis of National Skills Coalition also made significant contributions.

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Definitions

Racial equity:

Racial equity is achieved when race or immigration status is no longer correlated with one's outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live.¹ An example of achieving racial equity in workforce development is when race or immigration status no longer determines the likelihood of a participant's completion of a training program or their educational attainment.

Equality:

A situation "in which everyone has the same amount of something (food, medicine, opportunity) despite their existing needs or assets."² Equity has been described as "about fairness" and equality "about sameness."³

Diversity:

The representation of "varied identities and differences (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, tribe, caste, socio-economic status, thinking, and communication styles), collectively and as individuals."⁴

Inclusion:

A culture of belonging that actively invites the contribution and participation of all people.⁵

Structural racism:

"A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with 'whiteness' and disadvantages associated with 'color' to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic, and political systems in which we all exist."⁶

Underrepresented people of color:

Term used within this report to refer to Black, Latinx,⁷ Native, and certain Asian American and Pacific Islander workers with disproportionately low representation among postsecondary credential holders and in certain well-paying occupations and industries.

Every person and every worker in the country deserves a fair shot at achieving economic stability and success.





Executive Summary

The ethnic and racial diversity of the residents of the United States of America is one of the country's unique strengths; however, Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, Native, and certain Asian American workers face wide racial inequities in educational attainment, employment, and income. Immigrants, the majority of whom are people of color, face similar inequities in their educational and employment opportunities. The United States has fueled these disparities through decades of intentional, structurally racist policies, including those that have shaped postsecondary education and training.

There are *huge* implications of these disparities for people, businesses, and our economy. Every person and every worker in the country deserves a fair shot at achieving economic stability and success. This is the right aspiration, especially for a country that professes the ideals of liberty and justice for all.

As for businesses, the U.S. workforce finds itself at a crucial inflection point. Middle-skill jobs, which require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree, make up the largest part of the labor market in the United States and in each of the 50 states.⁸ Yet too few workers can access the skills, training, and education for middle-skill jobs, resulting in a middle-skills gap.

Additional workforce policies are needed now to counter decades of intentional, structurally racist policies and advance racial equity in educational attainment, employment, and income. As long as these disparities exist, the country is undercutting its own economic competitiveness.

Racial workforce diversity is a key driver of America's economic growth as it is one of the most important predictors of business sales revenue, customer numbers, and profitability.⁹ Racial and gender diversity in the workforce was a major contributor to U.S. economic growth in the latter half



Racial workforce diversity is a key driver of America's economic growth as it is one of the most important predictors of business sales revenue, customer numbers, and profitability.

of the 20th century. Specifically, more than 25 percent of the growth in productivity between 1960 and 2008 was associated with reducing occupational barriers for Black people and women.¹⁰ If education and training produced more equitable results for workers of color, the country could not only address this middle-skills gap, but our workers, businesses, and economy would improve.

Now is the time to adjust workforce policies and craft new ones to correct racial disparities in educational attainment, employment, and income. By 2030, people of color will make up more than half of the national workforce.¹¹ By 2044, most U.S. residents will be people of color.¹²

This report builds the case for creating a racially inclusive workforce and recommends both state and federal workforce development policies that advance racial equity. It recognizes that the challenges faced by people of color with deep generational roots in the United States and the challenges faced by immigrants sometimes differ; however, the policy agenda included here aims to address inequities for people of color from both immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds.

Finally, this report acknowledges that workforce training and education is a crucial component, but *not the sole answer*, to addressing the vast employment, income, and wealth inequities between people of color and White Americans in the U.S. It is our hope that the agenda included here for advancing racial equity within state and federal workforce policies aligns with and supplements broader efforts in both the public and private sectors to achieve racial and economic justice.

To advance racial equity through workforce policies, National Skills Coalition recommends the following:

1. Adopting racial equity goals and developing plans and systems to support them;
2. Investing in infrastructure, technical assistance, and guidance to support local practices that advance racial equity;
3. Advancing racial equity through postsecondary training policies, including career pathways and stackable credentials of value, job-driven and need-based financial aid, and tuition equity for immigrants;
4. Removing barriers to correctional education and training connected to re-entry;
5. Using sector partnerships to advance racial equity;
6. Employing apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs to advance racial equity;
7. Implementing upskilling policies for adults with foundational skills gaps;
8. Investing in support services for education and training participants; and
9. Removing work requirements and education and training restrictions in public assistance programs.

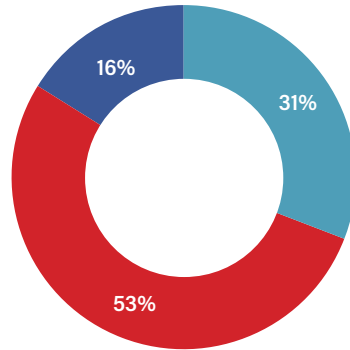
Most jobs in the U.S. are middle-skill jobs and many pay well, yet not enough workers have access to training for middle-skill jobs

Middle-skill jobs, which require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree, make up the largest part of the labor market in the United States and in each of the fifty states.¹³ People in middle-skill jobs are the construction workers who build and repair our homes, roads, and bridges; the healthcare technicians who care for us and our families when we get sick; and the air traffic controllers, electricians, computer network specialists, and mechanics who keep our infrastructure up and running. They are the police officers and firefighters whose duty it is to keep us safe.

Demand for middle-skill jobs will remain strong well into the future. Between 2014-2024, nearly half of job openings will be middle-skill. In comparison, high-skill jobs — those requiring a bachelor’s degree or beyond — will represent only 32 percent of job openings. Lower-skill jobs will represent 20 percent of job openings.¹⁴

However, the United States faces a middle-skill gap: **middle-skill jobs account for 53 percent of the labor market, but only 43 percent of workers have access to training at the middle-skill level.** Broadly, this skills gap is either nonexistent or less pronounced at the lower- and high-skill levels.¹⁵ Further, many jobs that require middle-skill credentials are well-paying jobs.¹⁶

Jobs by Skill Level, United States, 2015



■ High-Skill ■ Middle-Skill ■ Low-Skill

Source: NSC analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2015

There are more middle-skill jobs than workers trained to that level



While providing middle and high school students with career education is critical, education and training for *adults* of color is also key to addressing the middle-skills gap. The current skills gap *cannot* be closed by focusing on K-12 education alone: If each and every U.S. high school student trained for a middle-skill job, there would STILL be unfilled positions.

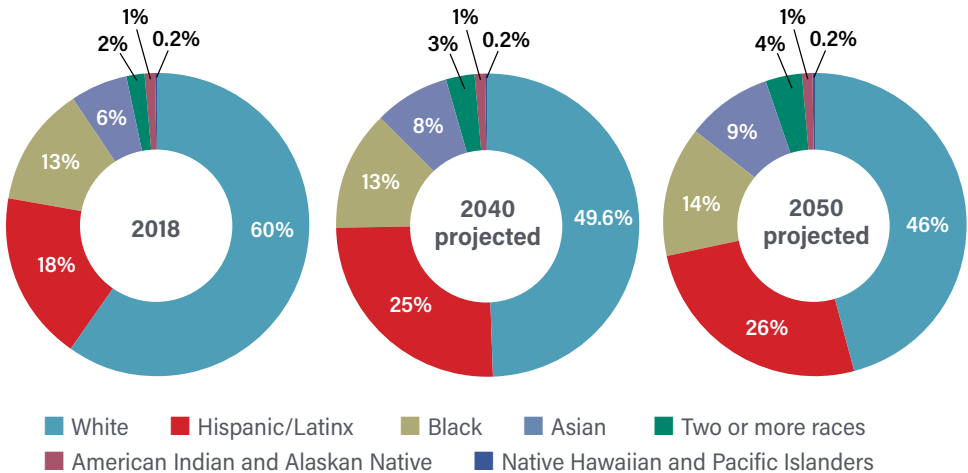
Soon most people in the U.S. workforce will be people of color, including a significant and growing share of immigrants

While the United States faces a middle-skill gap, racial and ethnic diversity among the general population is increasing. **By 2030, more than half of the existing workforce and all net new workforce growth will be made up of people of color.**¹⁷ And by 2032, most workers without a four-year college degree will be people of color.¹⁸ Many of these workers can be positioned to fill middle-skill jobs and help address the country’s middle-skill gap, while securing their share of well-paying middle-skill jobs.

Immigrants of color will contribute to the growing racial diversity of the workforce. By 2035, immigrants — already a significant portion of the workforce — will represent more than one in five working-age adults.¹⁹ Most immigrants are non-White,²⁰ and this trend is expected to continue well into the future, with Asian and Latinx immigrants making up the largest shares of new Americans.²¹

People of color projected to become the majority of the “working-age” population by 2040

U.S. POPULATION BY RACE, AGES 18-64



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2018 Population Estimates and author’s calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau 2017 National Population Projection Datasets.



Our society will be truly fair and just when people of every race and ethnicity have what they need to thrive, and can contribute to their highest and best potential, no matter the color of their skin or where they live.

Racial diversity is a strength, and advancing equity is an economic and moral imperative

America's increasing racial diversity should be viewed as an opportunity — not with apprehension. Increasing the racial diversity of the workforce has been linked to better outcomes for both individual businesses and the economy overall. Indeed, racial workforce diversity is one of the most important predictors of sales revenue, customer numbers, and profitability.²² Increasing racial and gender diversity in the workforce was a major contributor to U.S. economic growth in the latter half of the 20th century. Specifically, more than 25 percent of the growth in productivity between 1960 and 2008 was associated with reducing occupational barriers for Black people and women.²³ Furthermore, companies led by racially diverse teams are more likely to experience above-average financial performance.²⁴ Expanding career pathways for people of color and supporting their advancement along these pathways are necessary precursors to achieving these positive outcomes.

While increased racial **diversity** correlates with better outcomes for businesses, racial **disparities** are harmful not only to people of color but to the economy overall. Disparities in educational attainment, wage, and employment by race and ethnicity carry heavy costs. **In 2015, the economy would have been \$2.5 trillion larger had there been no racial gaps in income.**²⁵ Closing educational achievement gaps between Black and Latinx children and their White counterparts would result in an estimated \$2.3 trillion benefit to the U.S. economy by 2050.²⁶

Closing gaps by boosting educational and skill attainment — and eliminating bias in pay and hiring — better supports workers, families, and communities. In a more equitable economy, consumer spending is likely to increase, driving further economic growth and the cycle of job creation.²⁷

Advancing racial equity is not only economically beneficial, it is also the **right thing to do**. Our nation was founded on the ideals that all persons are created equal and that all are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As a nation, we aspire to notions of fairness and decency. Though we as a nation have struggled since our founding to live up to these ideals, we must commit to racial equity if we are to truly live up to them. Our society will be truly fair and just when people of every race and ethnicity have what they need to thrive, and can contribute to their highest and best potential, no matter the color of their skin or where they live.



Racial and ethnic inequities in educational attainment, employment, and wages are the result of intentional historical and current policies and practices that have systemically limited educational and economic opportunities.

Racial disparities in educational attainment and access to training hold the economy back

Despite all the potential benefits inherent in diversifying the workforce and ensuring that people of all races are equally represented in good-paying jobs, racial disparities in postsecondary educational attainment and job training outcomes continue to hold workers, businesses, and the economy back from reaching this full potential. Racial disparities in educational attainment,²⁸ wages,²⁹ and employment³⁰ exist for both adults born in the U.S. and those who immigrated here from abroad.

Critical workforce challenge

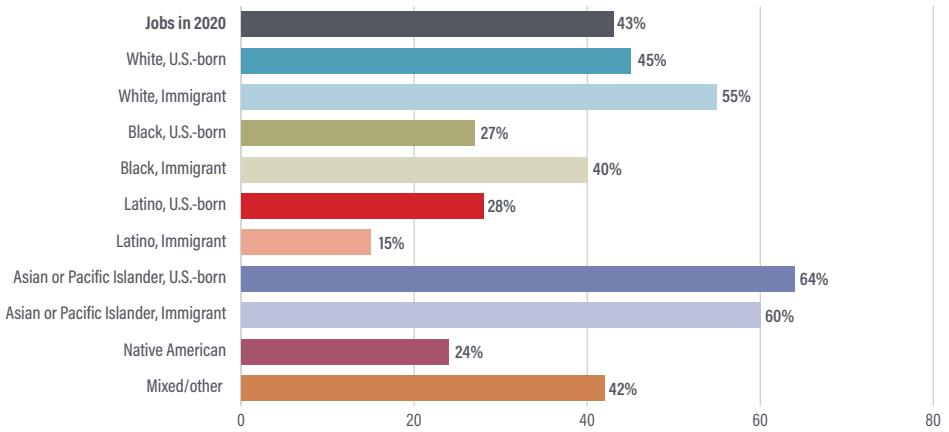
These disparities, particularly in educational attainment and employment, represent a critical workforce challenge that has wide implications for the workforce of the future. A U.S. economy that is facing a middle-skills gap while Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans are growing as a share of the population, cannot expect to close that skills gap without addressing racial disparities.

Racial and ethnic inequities in educational attainment, employment, and wages are the result of intentional historical and current policies and practices that have systemically limited educational and economic opportunities for Black, Latinx, and Native Americans as well as immigrants. Countering the disparities in educational attainment through skills-focused policies is a key piece of addressing wage and employment disparities, closing the nation's skill gap, and improving the nation's overall economy.

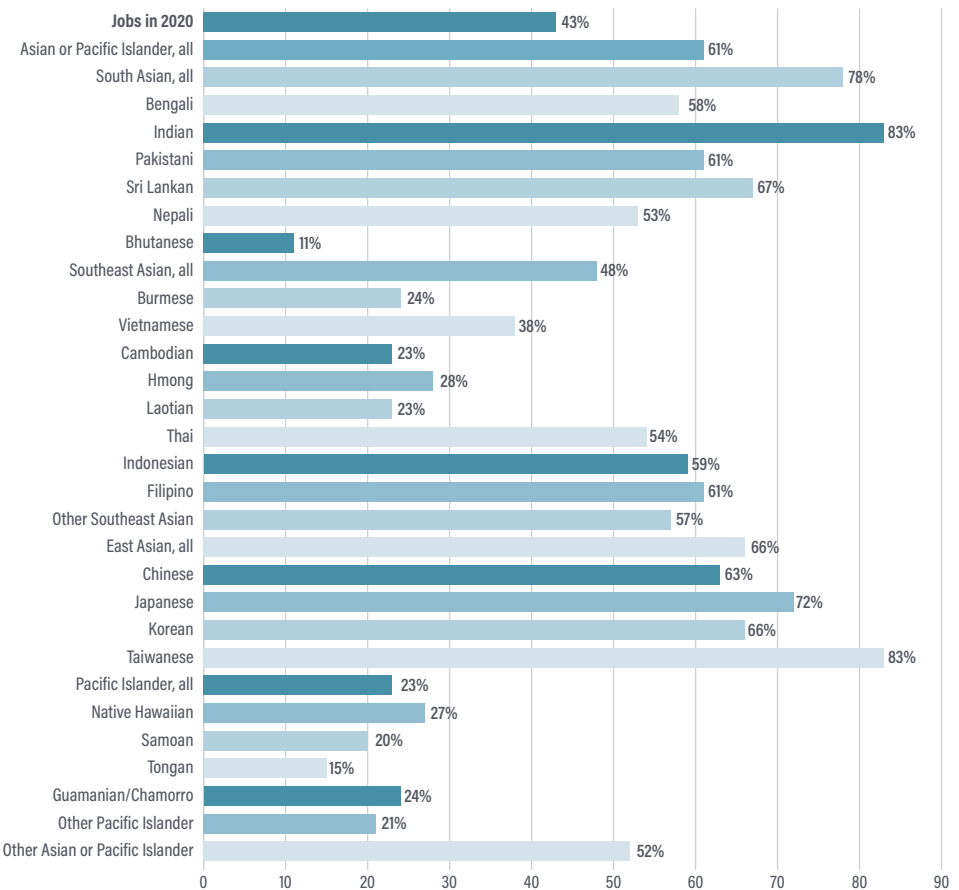
As the charts above show, racial disparities in educational attainment exist for both American adults born in the U.S. and those born in other countries. Latinx immigrants are the least likely to have attained an associate degree or higher, with just 15 percent of adults reaching that threshold, followed by Native Americans (24 percent) and U.S.-born Black people (27 percent). In contrast, White immigrants (55 percent) and U.S.-born White people (45 percent) are substantially more likely to have reached that level of educational attainment.

There are also very wide differences in attainment among different ethnicities categorized as Asian — a category that “consolidates 21 million different people from forty-eight different countries, each with different contexts of immigration and wealth, into a single group.”³¹ This is evident in the disaggregated data on educational attainment. Only 11 percent of Bhutanese Americans — born in the U.S. or abroad — have an associate degree or higher, while only 23

Current educational attainment and projected state/national-level job education requirements by race/ethnicity and nativity: United States, AA degree or higher, 2015



Current educational attainment and projected state/national-level job education requirements by race/ethnicity and ancestry: United States, AA degree or higher, Asian or Pacific Islander, All people, 2015



Source: PolicyLink / PERE National Equity Atlas, www.nationalequityatlas.org

percent of Pacific Islander, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans have reached that level of educational attainment. In contrast, South Asian (78 percent) and East Asian Americans (66 percent) have higher educational attainment rates.

All of these disparities are the result of historical and current policies and practices that have systemically limited educational and economic opportunities for people of color.

SPECIAL NOTE ON INSUFFICIENCY OF DATA ABOUT NATIVE AMERICANS

This report includes disaggregated data specific to Native Americans whenever possible. At the same time, it recognizes the shortcomings of data availability for Native Americans. Challenges have long existed in gathering data about Native Americans. Economic data about Native Americans is often outdated and insufficient to interpret reliably.³² Data about Native Americans is frequently described as statistically insignificant and often excluded from institutional data and reporting.³³

Lack of data from Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) contributes to the overall issue. Only about half of TCUs participate in the National Student Clearinghouse at any one time, compared to 84 percent of degree-granting colleges authorized to distribute financial aid under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.³⁴

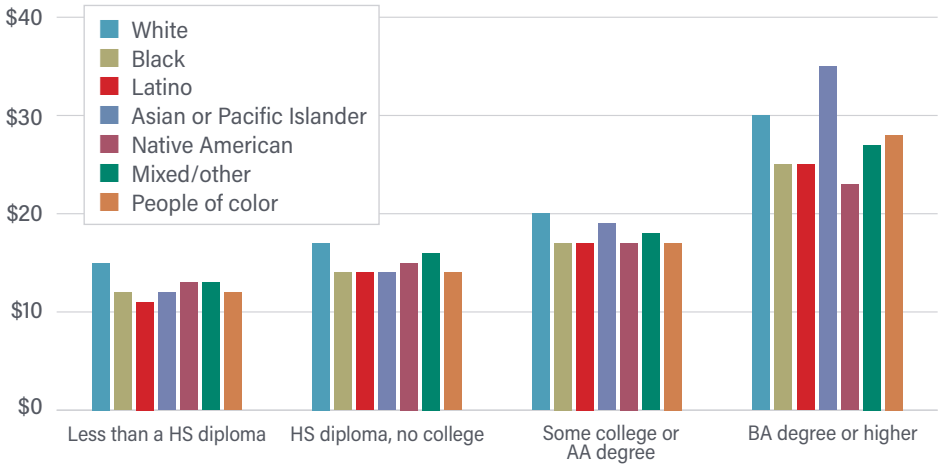
Apprenticeships and certificates

As descriptive as the charts in the previous section are, they do not tell the entire story on educational attainment, especially for middle-skill positions. An associate degree is not the only middle-skill postsecondary credential of value in the labor market. To secure good middle-skill jobs, students can complete apprenticeships — on-the-job training with a classroom component. Students can also earn college certificates in fields like healthcare, transportation and distribution, and advanced manufacturing that can lead to lucrative careers.

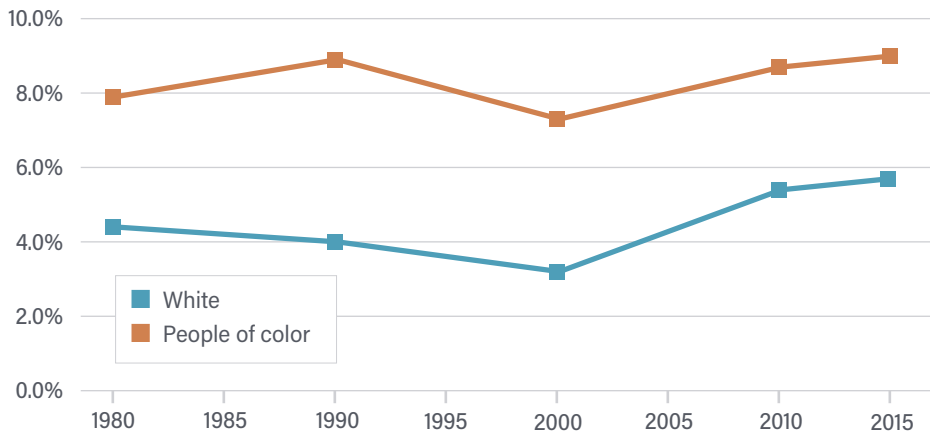
Black and Latinx participation in apprenticeship roughly aligns with the labor market participation rates for these groups.³⁵ A specific focus on certificate attainment by ethnicity finds that Black Americans are more likely to report certificates as their highest level of educational achievement.³⁶

However, Black adults earn lower wages across all attainment levels, including apprenticeships,³⁷ certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees.³⁸ Better data transparency about career outcomes, improved career counseling, and some of the other solutions discussed in this report are needed to tackle these disparities.

Median hourly wage by race/ethnicity and education: United States, 2015



Unemployment rate by race/ethnicity: United States, 1980-2015



Source: PolicyLink / PERE National Equity Atlas, www.nationalequityatlas.org

English language learning

Disparities in English language proficiency contribute to disparities in educational attainment, employment, and earnings. More than 19 million working-age American adults are English learners,³⁹ including 12.7 million who are currently employed.⁴⁰ Overall, English learners represent one in nine workers in the United States. English learners are also disproportionately people of color.⁴¹ English skills are vital for obtaining (and advancing in) many types of employment, particularly in fast-growing personal and business services occupations where workers have extensive interpersonal interactions with customers and co-workers.

Why focus on policy?

An extensive array of historical and current policies and practices have systemically limited educational and economic opportunities for people of color. Public policy decisions play a key role in forming the racial inequities in educational attainment, employment, and wages, as well as in systems that impact people of color's access and outcomes in postsecondary education and training. Therefore, public policies must be an integral part of the **solution**. We need policies that counter structural racism by proactively advancing racial equity in postsecondary education, training, and employment.

WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION ARE CRUCIAL COMPONENTS, BUT NOT THE SOLE ANSWER TO ADDRESSING EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, OR WEALTH DISPARITIES

Improving educational attainment and increasing workforce development efforts among underrepresented people of color are crucial pursuits that lead to increased family and economic stability. However, they are not the sole answers to systemic social inequities, as many disparities exist even when comparing groups with identical educational attainment. Efforts to close race-based skills disparities will need to be coupled with other efforts addressing hiring bias, the racial wealth gap, neighborhood segregation, broadband internet access, and a host of other factors in order to fully close equity gaps in employment, income, and wealth. **To strengthen their own workforces, employers can and should be critical partners in addressing these disparities.**

Hiring bias and unemployment

Black Americans⁴² are substantially more likely to experience unemployment than White Americans — regardless of educational attainment. Black and Latinx Americans are also more likely to be involuntary part-time workers or underemployed.⁴³ Rapid growth in educational attainment over generations has not translated into equivalent employment gains and security for Black and Latinx Americans.⁴⁴ This indicates that hiring bias is likely also a factor driving these disparities.

Experts recognize that Black-White wage differences not adequately accounted for by education or other observable characteristics may be due to discrimination. For example, one study sent fictitious resumes in response to job ads in Boston and Chicago in 2001 and 2002 and found that resumes with names more prevalent among White people received a 50 percent higher callback than identical resumes with names more common among Black people.⁴⁵

The racial wealth gap

Even if educational attainment disparities are addressed, stark racial wealth disparities will continue to leave Black, Latinx, Native, and certain Asian American and Pacific Islander communities at a disadvantage. The causes of racial wealth dispar-



Middle-income White households have eight times as much wealth (\$86,100) as middle-income Black households (\$11,000) and ten times as much wealth as middle-income Latinx households (\$8,600).

ities extend far beyond differences in educational attainment, and include both historical and contemporary factors such as the denial of mortgages, business loans, and tuition assistance for servicemembers of color; federally sanctioned housing discrimination through practices such as redlining; the denial of social security to farmworkers and domestic workers; the racialized denial of access to the asset of citizenship; and wage theft through U.S. slavery.⁴⁶

Middle-income White households have eight times as much wealth (\$86,100) as middle-income Black households (\$11,000) and ten times as much wealth as middle-income Latinx households (\$8,600).⁴⁷ Greater household wealth allows families to build financial security through postsecondary education and training, homeownership, and retirement investing. Wealth also tends to stay with a family, passing on from generation to generation in the form of gifts, tuition assistance, rent or housing down payments, and inheritances that progressively accumulate wealth and assets.⁴⁸

Geographic segregation (neighborhood segregation and access)

The pervasiveness of geographical segregation policies like redlining and racial steering by banks and real estate companies continues to impact the education options and job opportunities communities of color can readily access today.⁴⁹ In some cases, there are actual physical barriers between communities of color and where job centers are.⁵⁰ Smarter workforce development policies can address some of these barriers (e.g., by locating training programs within target communities); however, inclusive economic development is needed to ensure that people of color not only have access to quality job opportunities across their region, but also access to family-supporting job opportunities within their own communities.⁵¹

Broadband internet access

The digital divide between people who have broadband internet access and those who have no access or cell phone-only access is also a huge barrier to accessing postsecondary education and entering the workforce.⁵² Enrollment applications, financial aid applications, work requirements, and job openings are now almost exclusively accessible via the internet, and many sites are not fully accessible to mobile-only users.⁵³

The expense of broadband internet service and language barriers likely play a role in the digital divide between Black and Latinx families and their White counterparts. Spanish-language dominant Latinx Americans are less likely to report having high-

speed internet at home. Additionally, most U.S. adults who do not have broadband cite the monthly cost of broadband internet service as a reason for not subscribing.⁵⁴

Lack of full access to the internet hampers workers' ability to develop digital literacy – the ability to smoothly navigate and interact with digital interfaces and systems. In an increasingly tech-based world, digital literacy is a core part of modern skilled work and is required for workplace success.⁵⁵

Wage stagnation

At the low-wage end of the labor market, wages that have not kept pace with inflation disproportionately impact workers of color. About three quarters of White workers earn at least \$15 per hour, compared to 60 percent of Black workers, 51 percent of Latinx workers, and 59 percent of Native American workers.⁵⁶ Additional data show that raising the minimum wage even to \$12 per hour would also disproportionately benefit Black and Latinx workers.⁵⁷

The subminimum wage for tipped workers also disproportionately impacts workers of color. The federal government in 1996 established a subminimum wage for tipped workers at \$2.13 an hour, which is less than 30 percent of the federal minimum wage. As of 2014, Latinx workers represented 15.6 percent of the total workforce, but 17.7 percent of tipped workers. Workers grouped into the category of “Asian or other race” represented 7.3 percent of the total workforce, but 12.3 percent of tipped workers.⁵⁸

Access to healthcare

Poor health prevents people from fully participating in the workforce and earning more income. Sickness makes workers more likely to miss work or work while ill or injured. Workers with health-related disabilities are less likely to be able to perform basic tasks at work like lifting small objects, kneeling, or standing for two hours.⁵⁹ In all of these cases, workers may miss out on the opportunity to earn more income, either by missing work or by not being able to perform the required tasks of a job in a higher-paying field.

Due to policy barriers,⁶⁰ nonelderly Latinx, Black, and Native people are significantly more likely to be uninsured than their White counterparts.⁶¹

Americans within these racial groups are also more likely to delay health care because of cost, reflecting the higher poverty rates and lower median wages for these groups.⁶²

Workforce training and education policies to advance racial equity

Though they are not the *sole* answers to achieving racial equity, improving educational attainment and increasing workforce development efforts among underrepresented people of color are vital to this objective. Black, Latinx, Pacific Islanders, Native, and other underrepresented Americans of color (including Laotians, Hmong, and Cambodians) experience countless barriers in postsecondary education, training, and the workforce. Many barriers to access and success are the result of generations of intentional policy decisions made to preclude people of color from accessing White spaces and the power associated with them. Even some theoretically universal policies such as the G.I. Bill have increased racial disparities rather than lessening them due to policy choices made about implementation.⁶³

The following section includes a list of initial ideas to counter structural racism by proactively advancing racial equity in postsecondary education, training, and employment. These **initial ideas** are by no means a definitive agenda. Included along with each of these policy ideas is a short discussion of why they matter in advancing racial equity.

1. Adopt racial equity goals and develop plans and systems to track progress

Why this matters for racial equity

Racial equity goals in postsecondary attainment and local workforce development plans help focus collective efforts on achieving racial equity instead of perpetuating disparities. Data systems are crucial to inform decision making and track progress toward closing equity gaps. Both plans and well-designed systems give education and workforce development professionals the opportunity to assess barriers for underrepresented people of color and address any gaps.

Policy solutions

Embed racial equity goals within postsecondary attainment goals and in local workforce development plans, and develop strategies to reach these goals

Over forty states have adopted postsecondary attainment goals⁶⁴ — goals that define the share of the state population that will need to hold a quality credential beyond high school in the near future. Sixty percent of Americans overall will need a postsecondary credential by 2025, yet only 48 percent of working-age Americans hold such a credential currently.⁶⁵ On a national level, achieving these attainment goals is extremely unlikely without increasing the attainment levels of people of color. It is downright impossible in many individual states.⁶⁶

To address these disparities and reach overall attainment goals, states must have good data on credential attainment by race and ethnicity and a goal for closing these gaps. **Of the forty-three states with postsecondary attainment goals, thirty states have set goals to close**

racial equity gaps or improve outcomes for students of color, and twenty-nine states use data to illustrate the extent of racial gaps in college enrollment, persistence, completion, and/or attainment.⁶⁷

Establishing racially-specific goals helps galvanize stakeholders to make specific changes to close these gaps. States like **Texas** have awarded grants to institutions serving Latinx and Black male students to directly impact their success in securing a certificate or degree.⁶⁸ **Minnesota** also granted money to two- and four-year institutions that served historically underrepresented communities to provide services like paid internships and other services that promote long-term academic success. By setting specific goals for students of color at the outset, states can explicitly focus strategies and resources on meeting those goals and closing equity gaps; without such goals, states might adopt policies that unintentionally perpetuate racial disparities.⁶⁹

Include racial equity goals in local and state workforce development plans

Some localities have included racial equity goals in their local workforce development plans as a way of motivating action in their communities.⁷⁰

Portland, Oregon's *Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion* aims to advance equity through policy and practice in all aspects of life in the Portland metro, including city workforce training and hiring as well as expanding workforce development to create strong employment pipelines for people of color. Using this plan, Portland enhanced apprenticeships and convened a Workforce Diversity Summit to increase the number of skilled construction tradespeople needed for large projects.

States should also include racial equity goals in their workforce development plans. States have an opportunity to include these goals in the new workforce development plans they are required to submit in 2020 under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). For example, **Minnesota's** *Workforce Development Strategic Plan 2016-2020* has two goals: reducing "educational, skills training, and employment disparities based on *race*, disability, disconnected youth or gender"; and building "employer-led industry sector partnerships that expand the talent pipeline to be inclusive of gender, *race*, and disability to meet industry demands for a skilled workforce."⁷¹

The Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) is a useful resource for state, local, and regional governments setting racial equity goals and developing plans to implement them. GARE is a national network of government organizations working to achieve racial equity. GARE encourages organizations to identify clear racial equity goals; use racial equity tools that help institutionalize the consideration of racial equity in decision-making; and to be data-driven.

—*racialequityalliance.org*



States should convene relevant stakeholders to discuss which types of non-degree credentials are credentials of value so that racial inequities in the attainment of those credentials can be addressed.

Include racial equity goals in state Career and Technical Education plans

States should also incorporate racial equity goals as part of their planning around Career and Technical Education (CTE). The federal Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, commonly known as Perkins V, requires states to submit implementation plans to the federal government in Spring 2020. States face a host of requirements related to “special populations” in their Perkins planning process.⁷² While the Perkins definition of special populations does not include race, many of the subgroups within the special populations category are disproportionately comprised of people of color. In addition, when states submit their Perkins performance data, they are required to disaggregate it by race and to identify and quantify any achievement gaps between any subgroup and CTE students as a whole. States can build on these federal requirements by adding specific goals for achieving greater racial equity in participant access and outcomes as part of their CTE plans, including accountability measures to ensure that such goals are tracked and evaluated.

Develop education and workforce data systems capable of tracking program access and outcomes-focused data by race and ethnicity, disaggregated by major subgroup

In order to measure progress towards closing equity gaps in adult, English language, postsecondary education, workforce training, and employment, states must collect and use information about outcomes and credential attainment, disaggregated by demographic characteristics.⁷³ **Minnesota**, for example, has disaggregated performance data on workforce programs by race and ethnicity through a public dashboard located on its Department of Employment and Economic Development website. The dashboard not only tracks data by race, but also by specific immigrant subgroups prevalent within the state, including Hmong and Somali immigrants.⁷⁴

Systems should not only track degree attainment disaggregated by race and gender, but also non-degree credential attainment, including industry certifications, badges, and certificates resulting from for-credit and non-credit programs, licenses, and registered and non-registered apprenticeship certificates. States should convene relevant stakeholders to discuss which types of non-degree credentials are credentials of value so that racial inequities in the attainment of those credentials can be addressed.⁷⁵

Make educational outcomes data disaggregated by race transparent and use data to address inequities

States should go beyond collecting and disaggregating data by race to creating a *data-driven decision-making culture*. States should use data disaggregated by race to assess disparities in

education, training, and apprenticeship completion rates. Where racial differences exist, more data may need to be collected to understand the root cause of these differences. Advocates in Minnesota, for instance, have used the state's disaggregated data to successfully advocate for specific programs proven to produce exceptionally positive results for people of color.⁷⁶

On the federal level, Congress should pass the College Transparency Act to allow the Department of Education to collect data on all postsecondary students disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and income level. The College Transparency Act would also mandate the accurate reporting of student outcomes including enrollment, completion, and post-college success.

The College Transparency Act would also require a user-friendly website to ensure that data are transparent and accessible for students, policymakers, and employers. *States* should also make data transparent through publicly accessible dashboards to help students, trainees, employers, and educators to make informed decisions.⁷⁷

Assess access issues when developing plans

A combination of issues make access to training difficult, including inaccessible locations, lack of awareness, long waiting lists, lack of skill-appropriate classes, limited availability, and hours. Barriers and service gaps should be accounted for when planning and developing strategies. Most states, for example, do not make data about postsecondary earnings by program publicly accessible through a consumer report.⁷⁸ Additional policies can limit program availability: e.g., locating programs outside of communities in need, scheduling postsecondary bridge program classes only during regular 9-to-5 work hours, or advertising only in English.⁷⁹

Policies and programs in **Texas** and **Tennessee** are helpful examples of actions states have taken to address access issues for people of color. In middle Tennessee, staff at the Urban League — an organization focused on economic empowerment for Black Americans⁸⁰ — are trained as ambassadors for Tennessee Reconnect, a last-dollar scholarship for adults to secure credential and degrees at community colleges. Ambassadors are trained to identify potential Reconnect students, answer basic questions about the program, and connect them to the right resources.⁸¹ Partnering with an organization familiar to and reachable by the Black community to conduct outreach for education and training opportunities helps to increase the accessibility of those programs to the community.

In Texas, the Socorro Independent School District has increased access to skills training for adult Latinx learners of color by providing evening courses in high schools in programs such as security services; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; computer repair and maintenance; and a pre-apprenticeship electrical program. By using high school career and technical education classrooms, equipment, and teachers, the school district was able to provide training at times and locations convenient for adult learners. In addition, because the program was overseen and funded by the district's adult education provider, it was provided at no cost to participants.

2. Invest in infrastructure, technical assistance, and guidance to support local practice that helps meet state/local equity goals

Why this matters for racial equity

Race-blind skills training is insufficient to address racial disparities and advance racial equity. Establishing racially-specific workforce development goals and plans are important, but it is also necessary to train workers on the front lines implementing those plans to advance racial equity. States and localities that have recognized this have invested in training and technical assistance for workforce development professionals to ensure that their efforts consciously address racial disparities. **Dedicated funding to advance racial equity efforts is crucial to ensuring that these efforts are prioritized and not abandoned because they compete with other funding obligations.**

Policy solutions

Invest in training for frontline workforce development and postsecondary career counseling staff who will be responsible for implementing plans

Racial equity or cultural competency training for frontline workforce development staff and postsecondary career counselors is vital to furthering equity. An example of such training is **Chicago** Jobs Council's Cultural Competency Training. This training allows frontline workforce development workers to examine their own identity in relation to power and privilege, identify and combat the implicit bias they bring to work, and discuss the impact of systemic, institutional, and individual "isms" on job seekers. This training also enables organizations to examine their cultural competencies and identify areas of improvement.⁸²

Governments and advocates should remember the value of community-based coalitions as they advocate for these investments. Community-based organizations can share their specific firsthand knowledge about the effectiveness of culturally-specific skills training and wraparound services.

Guidance for local workforce development offices/college career counselors on serving immigrants

Local workforce development centers are sometimes unclear about the rules about serving immigrants and how best to serve residents born outside the U.S., especially given the array of immigration statuses and potential language barriers. States such as **New York, Michigan, and California** have funded navigator positions and provided professional development for staff to improve immigrant access to public workforce services.⁸³ Michigan and California have also provided technical guidance to frontline staff on determining immigrant eligibility for WIOA Title I services.⁸⁴

An example of career counseling comes from the Michigan Office for New Americans, which offers the Michigan International Talent Solutions (MITS) program for immigrant jobseekers who have credentials from abroad. The MITS program uses specially trained workforce staff to provide career coaching and job-placement assistance and offers eligible candidates access to an online English language learning tool and short-term “reskilling” vouchers.

These first two recommendations — (1) adopting racial equity goals and plans and systems to track progress and (2) investing in infrastructure, technical assistance, and guidance to support local practice — are an appropriate starting place for states who have just begun the process of using their postsecondary training and workforce policies to advance racial equity. States should begin with clear and specific goals about closing racial equity gaps and robust systems capable of disaggregating data by race so that they can clearly measure their existing equity gaps and track their progress. Once goals are established, states should invest in technical assistance and guidance for the frontline workers who are responsible for implementing these plans.

These first two recommendations also offer an overarching frame for all the following recommendations. To successfully implement each of these proposals and track their impact, states must have in place capable data systems as well as technical assistance and guidance for frontline workers responsible for implementing these proposals.

3. Postsecondary training policies to advance racial equity

Why this issue matters for racial equity

Decades of policies have driven and continue to drive racial disparities in college completion. These policies include educational tracking in high schools, the policy drivers of the racial wealth gap, and policies that restrict access to college for certain immigrant groups. At the same time, access to high-quality credentials and degrees with value in labor market can translate to higher earnings in the labor market for Black, Latinx, and Native people as well as people from other underrepresented ethnicities. Policies like career pathways, job-driven financial aid, and tuition equity are needed to address racial disparities in college and credential completion as well as in earnings.

Career pathways and stackable credentials of value

Policies that create need for solution: Educational tracking and self-service models of education

Educational tracking in high schools

Educational tracking — the practice of separating students into different groups, classrooms, or learning pathways by perceived ability level or learning goals — was historically used to steer students of color into vocational educational programs that did not connect them to jobs in

high-demand fields or provide them with an on-ramp to a college credential.⁸⁵ This type of tracking has contributed to occupational segregation and racial income disparities.

Self-service models of college education

Many community colleges employ practices that act as impediments to completion for adult students and first-generation college students generally. These impediments disproportionately affect students of color. For instance, most community colleges utilize a “self-service” approach to education, offering a wide array of courses, programs, and scheduling that may or may not be tied to local employer demand.⁸⁶

College student to adviser to ratios are also high, making choosing among an extensive variety of courses especially daunting for adult students juggling the demands of work and family. A dizzying number of choices can also intimidate first-generation college students, and Black and Latinx college students are more likely than their White counterparts to be the first in their families to attend college.⁸⁷

Policy solution: Career pathways and stackable credentials of value

Policymakers should establish career pathways that help mitigate the many challenges adults of color face in securing college credentials. These pathways use career coaches who connect people with the right training and support services, expedite training, and provide in-demand “stackable” credentials.

State solution: The **Arkansas** Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) is a strong model of such a program. Arkansas assesses gaps in the state’s key industries and uses federal money to provide gap tuition funding and wraparound support services for adults so that they can complete their college credentials within in-demand fields. An independent study of the program has already confirmed that it produces a positive return on investment for the state, and the initiative’s graduates are helping to fill needs in the state’s high-demand industries.

Black students in Arkansas CPI are three times as likely as their counterparts in the general community college population to obtain a certificate or degree, and Latinx CPI students are four times as likely as their non-CPI counterparts to earn a credential.

Federal solution: On the congressional level, the Gateway to Careers Act would provide funding to higher education institutions, such as community colleges, provided they are applying in partnership with at least one workforce and at least one education partner. Funding would support an array of activities that help adult and other nontraditional students — including students of color — to enter career pathways and succeed in postsecondary education programs. These activities include, among others: career pathways navigation and case management services; emergency grants to help students who are facing financial hardships; and direct support services such as child care, transportation, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, assistance in obtaining health insurance, and assistance in obtaining federal nutrition and/or housing benefits.



Huge racial wealth gaps mean that non-White families are less able to financially invest in their children's postsecondary education, leaving college out of reach for many without taking out student loans.

Job-driven and need-based financial aid

Policies that create need for solution: Policy drivers of the racial wealth gap

As discussed previously, many policies helped to create the racial wealth gap. This gap has left many families of color with fewer resources to put toward educational attainment. In fact, when families of equal wealth are compared, studies show racial disparities in rates of four-year college graduation disappear.⁸⁸

The evidence of the wealth gap's ramifications plays out at the nation's community colleges. Broadly lacking generational wealth, Black and Latinx students spend a larger share of their income on college expenses. Huge racial wealth gaps mean that non-White families are less able to financially invest in their children's postsecondary education, leaving college out of reach for many without taking out student loans.⁸⁹

In fact, Black and Latinx students are more likely to take on student debt than White students⁹⁰ and borrow greater sums than White borrowers.⁹¹ Higher student loan balances, lower expected earnings, and less family financial support leave non-White borrowers not only at risk of exacerbating the racial wealth gap,⁹² but can also have a negative impact on college persistence and completion.⁹³

Policy solution: Job-driven and need-based financial aid

State and federal leaders could help more underrepresented adults of color earn postsecondary credentials by making education and training more affordable for them. This is especially important given the racial wealth gap and the smaller amount of financial resources available to Black and Latinx families specifically.

Federal solution: There is a special role for the federal government to play by filling in gaps in financial aid — providing aid to students enrolled in high-quality, short-term training programs that take less than 15 weeks to complete. **The federal government can expand Pell Grant eligibility to industry-recognized short-term credentials.** Pell is the nation's top source of need-based, debt-free financial aid, so extending its eligibility to short-term credentials would go a long way toward making in-demand, short-term credentials more affordable for underrepresented people of color.

To be eligible for Pell Grants, these programs should meet quality assurance standards and should be offered by an institution eligible to receive federal financial assistance. Quality assurance standards should include:

- Mandating that qualifying programs lead to a recognized academic or industry-recognized credential that aligns with local or regional industry demand, as confirmed by employers, including through industry or sector partnerships between employers, community colleges, and other key stakeholders;
- Requiring that qualifying programs be approved by a state educational agency, accrediting agency, or similar entity;
- Urging institutions to articulate short-term credentials with longer term career pathways leading to two- or four-year degrees; and
- Encouraging institutions to ensure that students participating in qualifying programs have access to student supports — including basic skills instruction, transportation and child care assistance, and other services.⁹⁴

State solution: States can also provide “job-driven” financial aid — that is, tuition assistance for middle-skill training programs generally (such as free community college) or for specific high-demand industries in the region. State financial aid can make attending school easier by filling in gaps in federal financial aid — providing aid to students enrolled in short-term training programs or those attending less than half-time. **Iowa**, for example has created the GAP Tuition Assistance Program to help students cover the cost of enrolling in non-credit short-term programs.⁹⁵

THE STATE ROLE IN ENSURING QUALITY FOR SHORTER-TERM CREDENTIALS:

States have a role to play in identifying which nondegree credentials are quality ones — which ones provide real value to workers, businesses, and other stakeholders. To determine quality, states should consider criteria such as substantial job opportunities, transparent evidence of the competencies mastered by credential holders, evidence of the employment and earnings outcomes of individuals after obtaining the credential, and stackability in education and training.

States can also pursue a range of policy options to help increase the attainment of quality non-degree credentials. For example, to support the articulation of short-term credentials with longer-term career pathways — a form of stackability — states could adopt performance funding models that reward education and training providers for helping individuals obtain additional credentials in the same field.

However, policymakers should take steps to prevent such models from creating perverse incentives for institutions to redesign programs and credentials for the purposes of artificially increasing completion rates (e.g., breaking up existing credentials into smaller, less marketable components solely for purposes of boosting overall attainment numbers).

States can and should use data disaggregated by race and gender to help ensure that institutions are not intentionally or unintentionally repeating the educational tracking that has historically taken place. States should also ensure that institutions do not direct students with real or perceived barriers to success into shorter-term programs in order to inflate performance outcomes and unintentionally perpetuate racial inequities.

Tuition equity

Policies that create need for solution: Policies restricting access to federal and state financial aid for certain immigrant groups

Paying for postsecondary education is a challenge for workers of all backgrounds. For people who were not born in the United States, the challenge can be magnified due to restrictive policies at both the federal and state levels.

To be eligible for **federal** student financial aid (either grants or loans), people born outside the U.S. must either have become naturalized U.S. citizens, or be “eligible noncitizens” — typically legal permanent residents, also known as green-card holders.⁹⁶ The remainder of immigrants are **not** eligible for federal financial aid. This includes millions of people who have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or are undocumented, among others. Immigrants who are not eligible for federal student financial aid are overwhelmingly people of color.⁹⁷

In addition to federal restrictions, most states forbid those with DACA, TPS, or undocumented status from accessing **state**-funded financial aid. A handful of states have also implemented legislation or other policies that forbid undocumented students from accessing state public higher education at all.

The federal government should enact legislation that would provide a pathway for individuals with DACA, TPS, and undocumented status to achieve permanent legal status and citizenship, and thus access to federal financial aid. However, in the meantime, states will need to take action to ensure that these people have equitable access to postsecondary education and financial aid.

Policy solution: Tuition equity and financial aid for immigrants not covered by existing financial aid

States can ameliorate some of the disproportionate financial burden placed on immigrants who are not eligible for federal financial aid by enacting policies to expand their eligibility for state-specific financial assistance in accessing postsecondary education.

States should **establish tuition equity policies that ensure that undocumented residents of their state are not disproportionately burdened by paying out-of-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities**. More than twenty states have already enacted such policies, guaranteeing that undocumented students can pay the same in-state tuition rates as their documented peers. (These policies often require the student to have lived in the state for a period of time, to have graduated from high school in that state, and to promise to apply for permanent immigration legal status as soon as they are eligible.)⁹⁸

Additionally, eleven states *do* allow undocumented students who meet certain criteria to access state financial aid.⁹⁹ To advance racial equity, states outside of these eleven should replicate their policies.

Both types of policies — tuition equity and access to state financial aid — should also be responsive to the issues facing mixed-status families. In such families, individuals may have different immigration statuses from each other, such as when a teenager is a U.S. citizen and a parent is undocumented. States should be cognizant of how being part of a mixed status family can complicate students' attempts to apply for financial aid and should design policies that are inclusive of such families.

PERMANENT PROTECTIONS AND A MIDDLE-SKILLS PATH TO CITIZENSHIP FOR DREAMERS

Congress should pass legislation to provide permanent protections and a middle-skills path to citizenship for Dreamers. There are roughly 2 million young undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children, including 700,000 who have temporary protection via the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Congress should pass legislation that provides these young people with a path to citizenship and recognize the role they can play in meeting the demand for middle-skill workers. Legislation such as the Dream and Promise Act would address these issues by allowing young people to obtain citizenship after earning one of several eligible types of postsecondary credentials, including many at the middle-skill level. To facilitate Dreamers' ability to earn such credentials, Congress should also remove outdated restrictions on states' ability to offer in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants and should allow Dreamers to become eligible for federal student financial aid earlier in their path to citizenship.

4. Remove barriers to correctional education and training connected to re-entry

Why this issue matters for racial equity

Over-policing and mass incarceration

Black and Latinx people are disproportionately policed, arrested, and incarcerated,¹⁰⁰ which not only stymies their ability to earn income while in jail or prison, but also creates criminal records that impact future employment prospects. Black and Latinx people together constitute 56 percent of the U.S. prison population, despite representing only 28 percent of the population overall.¹⁰¹ These disparities in incarceration are not the result of differences in behavior, but likely the result of differences in policing and bias. Black and White Americans, for example, use drugs at similar rates, but Black Americans are imprisoned for drug crimes at nearly six times the rate of White Americans.¹⁰²

Incarceration carries a number of collateral consequences on career prospects. Incarceration can prevent people from being eligible for job training programs and occupational licensure.¹⁰³ For example, a criminal record can reduce the likelihood that a job seeker will receive a callback by nearly 50 percent. This negative impact of a criminal record can be twice as large for Black Americans.¹⁰⁴

Policy solutions

The policy solutions discussed in this section focus on increasing access to education and training for those who have been incarcerated at some point in their lives. However, as noted in a previous section of this paper — workforce training and education are crucial components, but *not the sole answers* to addressing racial employment, income, or wealth disparities. Broader criminal justice reform efforts are necessary to reduce over-policing and mass incarceration of Black and Latinx people.

Increased state funding for correctional education

Given the over-policing of Black and Latinx communities and their disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system, increased support for correctional education and training connected to reentry is crucial to advancing racial equity.

Most state correctional educational programs offer adult basic education, preparation for the state's high school equivalency test, and career and technical education. Postsecondary partnerships with state corrections departments also expand access to college education for people in prison, though only about a third of state prisons offer access to postsecondary education.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, many states focus correctional education on prisons even though many inmates spend the majority (or all) of their time in jails.¹⁰⁶

Funding levels for these programs vary by state, and many states decreased their spending on correctional education between 2009 and 2012 during the Great Recession. **States should examine the availability of correctional education programs for inmates, and their connections to in-demand occupations, and address any gaps.**

Correctional education connections to re-entry goals/in-demand fields

Correctional education should be connected to re-entry goals and in-demand fields. For example, **California's** Department of Corrections offers CTE training in six career sectors with nineteen programs overall. Each program is "aligned with a positive employment outlook within the State of California, providing industry recognized certification" and "an employment pathway to a livable wage."¹⁰⁷ **Kansas** has supported demand-driven training programs for people who are incarcerated through an integrated education and training (IET) approach at one institution. The program uses a team-teaching model to provide foundational skills instruction, high school equivalency preparation, and technical skills training that equips individuals to become Certified Production Technicians. The program is supported through federal and state funds, and also includes case management.¹⁰⁸

FACT: People who are currently incarcerated in a federal, state, or local correctional institution have some limited eligibility for federal student aid through programs such as Second Chance Pell. Generally, restrictions on federal student aid eligibility are removed for formerly incarcerated individuals, including those on probation, on parole, or residing in a halfway house.

— *Reentry Mythbuster on Federal Student Aid, Federal Interagency Reentry Council*



Congress can show the same commitment to correctional education by completely overturning the ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated people, thus alleviating the need for future *administrative* action to extend the Second Chance Pell initiative.

Second Chance Pell

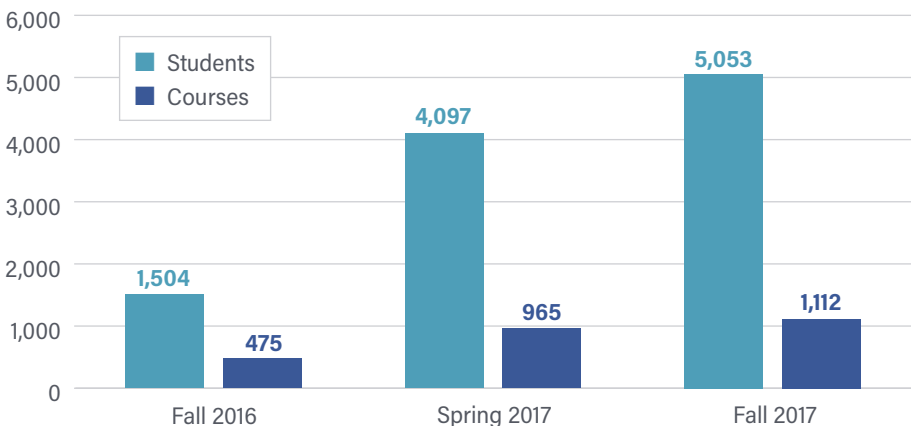
The **federal ban on Pell Grants** for incarcerated people was established in 1994. The ban resulted in decreased postsecondary enrollment for people in prisons.

However, in 2015, President Obama announced the Second Chance Pell pilot, a demonstration program that collaborated with selected colleges to restore Pell Grant eligibility for an estimated 12,000 students in more than 100 correctional institutions. Partner institutions included a combination of two- and four-year schools offering certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees.¹⁰⁹ These college and correctional institution partnerships taught more than 5,000 students in fall 2017, a 236 percent increase from fall 2016.¹¹⁰

The Department of Education announced in May 2019 that it will expand Second Chance Pell, enabling new colleges and universities to participate and more students to enroll in postsecondary programs while in prison.¹¹¹

Congress can show the same commitment to correctional education by completely overturning the ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated people, thus alleviating the need for future *administrative* action to extend the Second Chance Pell initiative.

Expanding enrollment and course offerings



Source: "Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative Update," Vera Institute of Justice, June 2018



To further racial equity in access to employment, states should assess and update their licensing laws, incorporating standards that provide transparency, accountability, and fairness to formerly incarcerated people.

SPECIAL NOTE: STATE BANS ON OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE

Many states automatically ban formerly incarcerated people from obtaining professional licenses for occupations in certain fields. These bans exist across professions, including those in in-demand fields like healthcare. Due to the disproportionate policing and incarceration of Black and Latinx people, these state bans on occupational licensing are especially harmful to these communities in securing jobs.¹¹² Additionally, the licensing restrictions prevent employers from accessing a large segment of the labor force.

States have passed laws creating uniform policies on dealing with criminal records across different occupational licensing boards. Maine, for instance, prohibits licensing boards from denying an applicant a license based solely on their criminal record and provides no explicit exceptions to that rule. Minnesota also clearly prohibits the denial of an occupational license based on an unrelated criminal record and prohibits denying a license if the “applicant has been released from incarceration for at least one year and can show ‘sufficient rehabilitation.’” To further racial equity in access to employment, states should assess and update their licensing laws, incorporating standards that provide transparency, accountability, and fairness to formerly incarcerated people.¹¹³

FAFSA changes

Additionally, **current federal law denies financial aid to persons who are convicted of certain drug-related offenses while receiving federal financial aid.** A related question on the FAFSA asks about these offenses.¹¹⁴ Both the aid prohibition and the question frustrate racial equity because people of color are disproportionately convicted of drug offenses. During the 2016-2017 student aid cycle, more than 1,000 FAFSA applicants were fully ineligible for financial aid because they had a drug-related conviction, **or** they failed to answer the question about convictions. Another 254 received a partial suspension of eligibility.¹¹⁵

Moreover, the mere presence of the question on the FAFSA may have a chilling effect on expanding access to college. Nearly two of three undergraduate applicants who disclosed a felony conviction never completed their applications, according to a 2015 study.¹¹⁶ The federal government should reverse this prohibition on financial aid for people convicted of drug offenses and remove the related question on the FAFSA.



Occupational segregation, or the separation of workers into different industries or seniority levels based on demographics, occurs across numerous intersections of race, gender, nativity, and physical and cognitive disability.

5. Use sector partnerships to advance racial equity

Why this matters for racial equity

Occupational segregation

Workers of color are more likely to staff low-wage jobs than White workers. More than half of Black workers and 60 percent of Latinx workers are paid less than \$15 per hour. Occupational segregation, or the separation of workers into different industries or seniority levels based on demographics, occurs across numerous intersections of race, gender, nativity, and physical and cognitive disability.

For instance, women of color and foreign-born women are overrepresented in low-wage, high-growth jobs like personal care aides (\$11.11 per hour average wage) and home health aides (\$11.16 per hour) compared to White women. Meanwhile, high-wage, high-growth jobs like registered nurses (\$33.65 per hour) skew White.¹¹⁷ While there are numerous potential causes of this disparity (e.g., inequity in training access or availability, transportation access, or training cost) the result is the same: lower wages leave people of color with lower earnings.

Racial homogeneity of hiring networks

Racial sameness within hiring networks reproduces historical inequities in access to well-paying jobs. More than 80 percent of social networks are racially homogenous. Therefore when these networks are tapped for hiring referrals, White people — the racial majority within well-paying jobs — are more likely to refer people of their same race.¹¹⁸ One national survey found that men of color were 26 percent less likely to receive referrals to jobs than White men and women of color were 35 percent less likely to receive a job referral.¹¹⁹

Hiring practices with discriminatory effects

Many employers engage in practices that result in racially inequitable outcomes for Black and Latinx jobseekers, such as asking about criminal histories and performing criminal background checks of job applicants. In one survey conducted by a human resources professional trade association, about half of human resource professionals reported that their employment application included a question about criminal history, and nearly three-quarters reported conducting background checks on job applicants. When applicants “fail” a pre-hire background check or screening, about half of human resources professionals report removing the job applicant from the pool. As previously discussed, decades of ill-advised policies have resulted in higher incarceration rates among Black and Latinx Americans, so criminal background checks have a disproportionately negative affect on these particular groups of potential employees.¹²⁰

Credit scores and histories also absorb past inequities for people of color. The racial wealth gap has left Black and Latinx households with fewer assets to cover financial catastrophes, such as job losses, income reductions, or unexpected bills. These catastrophes, and the missed bills left in their wake, are more likely to have a ripple effect on credit histories for Black and Latinx Americans.¹²¹

Policy solutions

Investments and technical assistance to enhance the diversity and inclusion practices of sector partnerships

Sector partnerships are regional collaboratives that bring together multiple employers within an industry to collaborate with community colleges, schools, labor, workforce agencies, community organizations, and other community stakeholders to align training with the skills needed for that industry to grow and compete. Sector partnerships have resulted in improved outcomes when compared to other forms of workforce development. Sector partnerships and their backbone organizations have employed numerous practices to advance racial equity including:

- attracting partnership members who reflect the racial and ethnic communities that they serve;
- participating in diversity, equity, and inclusion training;
- modifying recruiting processes to attract and engage specific populations of color; and
- disaggregating performance data to better understand how effectively their partnerships are serving different populations.¹²²

Public investment in these partnerships can be used to help bring in expert advisors to deliver training, and to help implement and scale these equity-advancing practices.¹²³ **Governments should also consider coupling technical assistance and policy guidance with their financial investments** so that sector partnerships have guidance on how best to use additional funding for this purpose.

Sector partnerships can work with employers to make their hiring practices more equitable

Sector partnerships can work with employers to change their hiring practices (e.g., how they define required competencies, source talent, etc.) to make them more equitable. For instance, one sector partnership backbone organization coached an employer partnership member on **degree inflation**. Specific skills acquired in a degree program may be important for success with an employer. However, explicitly requiring a degree for a position instead of those skills exacerbates the effect of racial disparities in educational achievement and eliminates workers who may have acquired those skills in other ways.¹²⁴

Sector partnerships have also counseled employers against automatically excluding potential employees using **criminal background checks** and **credit checks** because they have a disproportionately negative effect on Black and Latinx Americans.¹²⁵ The federal U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recommends a job-related analysis of an offense and an individualized analysis prior to any disqualification.¹²⁶ Sector partnerships can counsel employers in establishing and applying these analyses uniformly.



Pre-apprenticeship and pre-employment programs can be especially valuable for people of color who have been historically underrepresented in certain industries and apprenticeships.

6. Employ apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs to advance racial equity

Why this matters for racial equity

Historical segregation of apprenticeship programs

Segregation of apprenticeship programs historically kept people of color out of the major “apprenticeable” trades.¹²⁷ For instance, some building trades unions — a major source of apprenticeships — had “Caucasian only” clauses in their constitutions through the mid-1900s when government regulators forced their removal.¹²⁸ Following nondiscrimination legislation in 1963, participation rates for youth of color in apprenticeship continued to suffer because of lack of program awareness and access.¹²⁹ The historical segregation of apprenticeship programs has pushed people away from this valuable dual educational and workforce opportunity.

While racial disparities in apprenticeship *participation* have somewhat diminished over time, other disparities continue to exist. For example, Black apprentices still earn the lowest exit wages (\$14.35 per hour median wage) of all apprentices. White apprentices have the next-lowest earnings at \$26.14, nearly double what Black apprentices typically earn.¹³⁰

Policy solutions

Invest in pre-apprenticeship and pre-employment programs with culturally competent organizations

Pre-apprenticeship and pre-employment programs can be especially valuable for people of color who have been historically underrepresented in certain industries and apprenticeships. Pre-employment programs help workers acquire a basic level of industry-relevant skills. Pre-apprenticeship programs are one form of pre-employment program that prepare workers for apprenticeship.

Effective pre-apprenticeship programs expose workers to job sites and work environments and provide support for workers to address barriers to employment like child care and transportation. Perhaps most importantly, pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programs create formal access points to employers instead of requiring workers to rely on existing professional and social networks.¹³¹

Policymakers should require data disaggregated by race on pre-apprenticeship and pre-employment programs and use that data to target investments to organizations that have a demonstrated track record of effectiveness in serving people of color.

Additional policies and incentives for training underrepresented workers in apprenticeship (e.g. tax credits) or economic development and infrastructure projects

States that already offer workforce development incentives — for example, tax credits offered in Alabama and South Carolina to businesses that hire apprentices — could put more specific incentives in place that encourage employers to hire and train people of color or people from underserved communities. For example, **New York** created a two-tiered apprenticeship tax credit that provides a standard tax credit for hiring an apprentice and a larger credit for hiring an apprentice from a disadvantaged background (e.g., disconnected youth, people formerly in foster care, veterans, or people living below 200 percent of the poverty line). The nonprofit organization Young Invincibles has recommended that Illinois follow New York's lead to create more equitable access to apprenticeship.¹³²

Strategies to advance racial equity in workforce development should be embedded within larger economic development plans for communities. Within this economic development, clear accountability structures for training and hiring must also be established.¹³³

7. Upskilling policies for adults with foundational skills gaps

Why this issue matters for racial equity

Neighborhood underinvestment and K-12 school financing

A legacy of exclusionary housing policies and lack of neighborhood investment not only disconnects low-income families and people of color from job opportunities,¹³⁴ but also contributes to the underfunding of neighborhood K-12 schools, which undermines students' ability to complete high school and attend college.¹³⁵

Educational outcomes for children of color are “much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race.”¹³⁶ Studies indicate that children of color who attend better-resourced schools are more likely to perform well academically, graduate on time, attend college, and find good jobs.¹³⁷

Secondary school exclusionary discipline

K-12 students of color are more likely to experience disproportionate exclusionary discipline — including office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions — due in part to subjective teacher referrals and implicit bias. This can upset their high school completion, putting them at risk of not receiving a high school diploma — the gateway to postsecondary education or, in many cases, an apprenticeship or other form of work-based learning.¹³⁸

Inadequate funding for English language classes

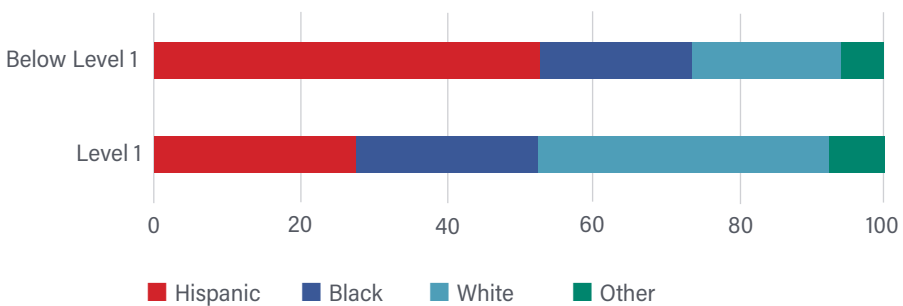
Public investment in English language programs for adults meets only a small fraction of the need. Funding for the federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, now known as Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, has fallen by 17 percent in the last two decades, and now reaches fewer than 1.5 million of the 19 million English learners in the US.¹³⁹

Moreover, classes that provide basic or “survival” English skills or English for academic purposes receive more public funding than classes that are focused on technical or vocational English. While basic skills and academic English are very important, the lack of proportionate investment in technical and vocational English skills can prevent workers who *already* have a survival job and basic language ability from acquiring the skills and credentials they need to advance into higher-wage, middle-skill jobs.¹⁴⁰

BLACK AND LATINX ADULTS OVERREPRESENTED IN THE LOW-SKILLED ADULT POPULATION

For some of the reasons listed above, Black and Latinx adults are disproportionately more likely to have low scores on the Survey of Adult Skills, conducted as part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. More than one in three Black adults and nearly one in two Latinx adults score below Level 2 in literacy on this assessment, compared to only one in ten White adults. Similar disparities exist for numeracy – the ability to use numerical and mathematical concepts. Fifty-nine percent of Black and 56 percent of Latinx adults score below Level 2 in numeracy, compared to 19 percent of White adults.¹⁴¹

Race/ethnicity of adults with low literacy skills in the United States



Source: Country Note: United States, Survey of Adult Skills Results, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Policy solutions

Policymakers can address the disproportionate foundational skill needs of people of color by investing in proven models that equip adults with the skills and supports they need to achieve their career goals. For example, states can ensure that there are a variety of on-ramps to post-secondary and workforce training programs, so that people with foundational skills needs are not unnecessarily turned away from such opportunities.

Analyze foundational skill needs and upskilling investments and develop plans to address inequities

Policymakers should also use data to analyze existing upskilling investments for adults with foundational skill needs to help assess gaps. Understanding the current landscape of investments in foundational skills — for both U.S.-born and immigrant workers — is vital to analyzing where gaps in these investments may be disproportionately burdening workers of color. Where gaps in upskilling investments create inequities, policymakers should develop plans to remedy the gaps.

A CASE STUDY IN UPSKILLING INVESTMENT: NEW YORK'S LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

New York's LaGuardia Community College is home to an innovative healthcare career pathways program for English learners. La Guardia's Center for Immigrant Education and Training and its Welcome Back Center¹⁴² help immigrants who came to the U.S. with healthcare experience and credentials to build their English and professional skills simultaneously, through an integrated program known as NY-BEST. Intensive 8-month, 16 hour-a-week courses help participants prepare for complex licensing exams in phlebotomy, EKG, or nursing. The program's success is reflected in its metrics: a 98 percent participant retention rate and 93 percent licensing exam pass rate for Licensed Practical Nurses. In addition, more than 70 percent of NY-BEST NCLEX graduates have found permanent employment with family-sustaining wages.¹⁴³

Increase funding for vocational and technical English language classes and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs

Federal solution: IET programs are proven model that provides instruction in foundational skills alongside occupational or industry-specific technical skills. Congress should increase investment in key legislation that supports English language acquisition and IET programs, such as Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Congress should also consider how the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act can ensure adult learners with foundational skills needs can have access to the supports they need to succeed in upskilling opportunities, such as through the proposed Gateway to Careers Act.¹⁴⁴

State solutions: States should increase investment in adult education programs, including vocational and technical English classes as well as IET. States should also consider how they can use state investments and/or federal WIOA Title II state leadership funds to provide technical assistance and professional development to assist local providers in designing and implementing effective vocational ESL and IET models.¹⁴⁵

EMPLOYERS CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF UPSKILLING POLICIES TO IMPROVE EQUITY IN THEIR WORKFORCE

Employers can take advantage of upskilling policies at the state or federal level to broaden pathways for workers of color. For example, one employer drew on matching funds available through their state's Manufacturing Extension Program to provide a Pre-LEAN English class for workers with limited English skills who could not otherwise have participated on an equal footing in LEAN Manufacturing training with their peers.¹⁴⁶ Other employers have capitalized on instructional support available through the state adult education system to provide onsite high school equivalency classes to workers, who are often disproportionately people of color.

Upskilling policies such as Integrated Education and Training can provide a spur to businesses that want to improve career paths for workers of color who have foundational skills gaps, by providing ready-made partners and supports via community college or adult education systems. In addition, employers interested in creating meaningful growth opportunities for workers can take advantage of policies establishing labor-management partnerships to jointly identify and develop new credentialing opportunities. Employers in California collaborated with one such labor-management partnership to create a new industry-recognized credential for environmentally sensitive janitorial services.¹⁴⁷ Workers who have benefitted from this upskilling opportunity are overwhelmingly people of color.

Increase take-up of Ability to Benefit provision among higher education institutions.

Congress has authorized community colleges and other higher education institutions to provide federal student financial aid to adults without a high school diploma or equivalent, provided that the institution can show that the individual has the "Ability to Benefit" (AtB) from post-secondary education. Students must be enrolled in a program that is part of a career pathway, and must meet other eligibility criteria.¹⁴⁸ AtB represents a powerful tool for equipping adults without high school credentials to access Pell Grant funding to pursue training for in-demand careers, and can be especially effective for people of color given the barriers to secondary education completion discussed elsewhere in this report.

But to date there has been very limited take-up of AtB, due to institutions' confusion over eligibility rules and a general lack of awareness. However, a handful of states have succeeded in

bucking this trend: **Washington** and **Minnesota** have issued guidance to institutions about how to use the AtB provision,¹⁴⁹ with **Texas** and **Wisconsin** also succeeding in encouraging greater take-up of this provision.¹⁵⁰ Other states should assess how they can best spur take-up of AtB, including whether existing mandates such as state postsecondary attainment goals¹⁵¹ can spark momentum. States should track use of AtB by race in order to ensure that people of color have equitable access to this tool.

Support innovative connections between community-based and higher education programs that provide effective on-ramps for adult learners with foundational skills needs

In recent years, some community colleges and other educational institutions have implemented creative models that allow adult learners and workers to more rapidly and efficiently demonstrate their existing skills, advance in career pathways, and obtain postsecondary credentials. Strategies such as competency-based education,¹⁵² Prior Learning Assessment (PLA),¹⁵³ and bridge programs¹⁵⁴ can all represent effective approaches for adult learners. States should support education and training providers in implementing these approaches in ways that are inclusive of that adult learners and workers, including people of color. In some cases, this may require establishing or deepening partnerships between higher education institutions and nonprofit community-based organizations that have expertise in serving adult learners and workers of color.¹⁵⁵ States can support these activities through funding, technical assistance, and/or policy guidance.

Implement high school equivalency to postsecondary acceleration policies

States are increasingly recognizing that adult learners can benefit from the availability of an alternative to traditional high school equivalency (HSE) programs. Accelerated HSE programs combine the ability to earn a high school credential with a postsecondary, industry-recognized credential and can help adults move rapidly along a career pathway into a well-paying job.¹⁵⁶ States should consider implementing policies that support accelerated HSE programs, and ensure that any such policies include mechanisms to assess how well accelerated programs are serving students of color.

Incorporate digital literacy goals as part of workforce and education investments

Digital skills continue to grow in importance for workers at all levels of the labor market, yet as detailed elsewhere in this report, people of color are disproportionately likely to face barriers in acquiring those skills. States should assess how digital literacy goals might best be included in their existing workforce and education investments, thus communicating that digital literacy is an inextricable part of workforce preparedness overall. In addition, states should consider whether additional investments or policies are needed to address digital equity issues, as proposed in the Digital Equity Act recently introduced in Congress.¹⁵⁷

A NOTE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTMENTS IN SKILL TRAINING FOR BLACK AND LATINX AMERICANS TO THE FUTURE OF WORK

The public narrative about the technological impact on the future of work has recently become less panicked. Experts now anticipate a future of work colored less by automatable job elimination than by job *transformation*.¹⁵⁸ Displacement and job transformations are unevenly spread across the U.S. workforce. They disproportionately impact workers already on the margin, including adults without a high school credential, with low literacy or numeracy skills, and working jobs with low wages.¹⁵⁹

For example, the thirty highest-employment and highly-automatable occupations in the U.S. are mostly low-wage with a disproportionate share of Black and Latinx workers. Over 31 percent of all Latinx workers and 27 percent of Black workers are concentrated in these high-risk jobs like cashiers, cooks, and laborers.¹⁶⁰ Several at-risk occupations — like clerical and administrative roles — are also heavily gendered, meaning their elimination will have disproportionate impact on women.¹⁶¹ Women, particularly older women, are more likely than men to work in highly automatable occupations vulnerable to elimination.¹⁶²

Highly-automatable jobs abound in service sector industries like retail, health and social assistance, and leisure and hospitality. These sectors employ one-third of the U.S. workforce. Service sector workers — a majority of whom are people of color, women, middle-aged, and/or parents — face future of work disruptions at numerous intersections. Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of service-sector workers have limited literacy skills and three-quarters have limited numeracy (74 percent) or digital problem-solving skills (73 percent).¹⁶³

These same groups at highest risk of job automation are historically underserved by traditional education and training programs. Diminishing public investment in workforce training, alongside private sector investment that prioritizes college-educated workers' professional development, leaves the most vulnerable workers without support.¹⁶⁴ Without strategic interventions — such as targeted retraining, a committed approach to addressing hiring biases, and many of the policy discussions discussed herein — future of work displacements could exacerbate racial and ethnic unemployment and underemployment disparities, causing further economic disruption.¹⁶⁵

8. Invest in support services for education and training participants

Why this issue matters for racial equity

Lower average earnings and wealth for people of color

Decades of intentional policy decisions, such as educational tracking and hiring practices with discriminatory effects, have led to higher levels of poverty and lower average earnings for people of color. At every educational level below bachelor's degrees, the median hourly wages for workers of color are lower than for White workers.¹⁶⁶ (Only Asian workers as a broad group have a higher median hourly wage than White workers at the bachelor's degree level and above.)

In addition to lower incomes, the racial wealth gap between Black, Latinx, Native, and White people¹⁶⁷ leave people of color with fewer financial resources for the non-tuition costs of training, including food, transportation, child care, tools, and equipment.

Residential segregation and transportation discrimination

Residential segregation of low-income families and people of color into disinvested urban cores during White flight created pockets of poorer living conditions, removed from the transportation options and job opportunities which proliferated in more affluent, White neighborhoods.¹⁶⁸ Many issues experienced by people of color today can be traced back to exclusionary practices like redlining and racial steering by banks and real estate companies.¹⁶⁹

Residential segregation can also keep well-paying jobs and education and training opportunities out of reach for communities of color. Long commutes to urban centers put added strain on rural and suburban workers while lack of access to a personal vehicle or reliable public transit can similarly strand urban workers.¹⁷⁰

Additionally, workers who commute via bus may face transportation discrimination — not being hired due to a lack of “reliable transportation,” like a personal vehicle. This transportation discrimination disproportionately affects people of color, lower-income workers, and disabled adults who face additional hurdles in obtaining and affording driver's licenses¹⁷¹ and securing affordable, accessible transportation options on a regular basis.¹⁷²

Policy solutions

Transportation assistance

To help address racial inequities in access to training, states and localities could provide transportation stipends that help adult workers reach education and training sites. **Washington, D.C.**, for example, allocated nearly \$2 million for an adult transportation subsidy in 2017 to give learners at publicly funded adult education programs the means to get to class.¹⁷³ Another example of transportation assistance outside of the public transit system involves **Maryland** and **Virginia's** Departments of Social Services. These departments support Vehicles for Change, a nonprofit organization that distributes donated vehicles to families with low incomes in need of transportation to get them to education, training or work.¹⁷⁴



States can leverage more federal dollars for support services by creating partnerships with existing organizations that provide these services to people with low incomes, such as community-based organizations and community colleges.

Leverage federal and state programs that provide assistance (e.g., food, transportation, child care) to support training for careers

States and local governments should leverage the following federal programs to support education and training. All of these programs are means-tested, and therefore targeted to help Americans with low incomes. Because of structural racism, Americans of Black, Latinx, Native, and Pacific Islander heritage are more likely to have lower incomes.

SNAP E&T

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services. SNAP E&T supports employment and training activities to increase the incomes of participants in SNAP,¹⁷⁵ the nation's largest food assistance program. SNAP served about 19 million households in January 2019¹⁷⁶ and SNAP E&T can be especially important to families of color: at least 41 percent of the households receiving SNAP are headed by a person of color.¹⁷⁷

SNAP E&T *program grants* can be used not only for tuition and fees, but also for career navigation services. SNAP E&T *reimbursement grants* of 50 cents on the dollar can be used for program costs exceeding those covered by E&T program grants and for support services, such as transportation, child care, and books and supplies. Costs eligible for 50 percent reimbursement must be paid for out of non-federal funding sources, such as state, local, and philanthropic sources. Federal funding for SNAP E&T reimbursement grants is currently uncapped — a key feature of this flexible funding source for supports.

Many states have not fully utilized the potential of SNAP E&T to better help adults access skill-building opportunities. States can leverage more federal dollars for support services by creating partnerships with existing organizations that provide these services to people with low incomes, such as community-based organizations and community colleges. The resources spent by these organizations on people with low incomes can, in turn, be used to draw down additional federal resources.¹⁷⁸

Project Jumpstart, run by **Maryland's** Job Opportunity Task Force, is a useful example of how SNAP E&T dollars can be used to provide support services for people of color. Project Jumpstart is a pre-apprenticeship construction training program that prepares its participants for well-paying jobs in construction, plumbing, electrical and related careers. The program provides participants with support services such as driver's education, high-quality tools, and financial assistance to obtain a used vehicle.¹⁷⁹

Project Jumpstart serves Maryland's SNAP participants as a partner of the state's E&T program, allowing Project Jumpstart to leverage its existing spending to draw down a 50 percent reimbursement of federal dollars that can be used for support services, as well as the costs of training itself. About 96 percent of enrollees in Project Jumpstart are Black men and between 75 and 80 percent of graduates are placed into employment.¹⁸⁰

Postsecondary student access to SNAP

SNAP rules explicitly exclude any students enrolled in college at least half time. However, there are a number of exceptions to this rule, including students who work for pay at least twenty hours per week, and students who participate in several types of federal or state employment and training or on-the job training programs. To expand access to SNAP for students of color, states can:

- Deem career-oriented postsecondary programs as equivalent to employment and training programs and therefore allowable under the student exclusions;
- Use their discretion to exclude state, federal, and institutional financial aid as income from means-tested benefits when states have the discretion to define what can be counted as income;¹⁸¹
- Average work hours across a week, month, trimester or semester to meet the 20-hour-a-week student exemption (and better address fluctuating work schedules for students);
- Eliminate asset limits — such as owning a car with a market value of more than \$4,650 or having more than \$2,250 in savings — so that students have a means of getting to school and some savings for financial stability; and
- Encourage colleges to inform all students who may meet the criteria for SNAP about their potential eligibility.¹⁸²

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program can also be used to provide support services for workers in education and training programs. The federal program provides cash assistance, work experience, and other supports to low-income families with children.¹⁸³ About \$16 billion in federal TANF funding is allocated across every state, and total program spending across states equals \$30 billion when each state's required match is included.¹⁸⁴

Partly due to the flexibility inherent in the program's structure, only 13 percent of 2017 TANF spending went to work supports; work, education, and training activities; and supportive services. Another 12 percent of federal TANF funding paid for child care.¹⁸⁵ States can use more of their TANF funding to support families with low incomes, many of whom are families of color.

For instance, **Arkansas** uses its federal TANF grant to provide support services to thousands of qualifying community college students with annual incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line (roughly \$50,000 for a family of four). These support services include direct tuition assistance; books, fees, tools and supplies; testing and certification fees; and child care and transportation vouchers.¹⁸⁶

Support services are a key feature of Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI), as they enable adult students to complete college credentials while working, raising a family, or both. They are especially important for Black and Latinx students, who are less likely to have access to the resources to secure these supports. The results of Arkansas' investment in such supports is paying off: Black students in Arkansas CPI are three times as likely as their counterparts in the general community college population to obtain a certificate or degree and Latinx students earn postsecondary credentials at four times the rate of non-CPI students.¹⁸⁷

Child Care and Development Block Grant

States can also use federal child care funds to better support parents of color participating in education and training. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the primary source of federal child care assistance funding flowing to states and states have some discretion in establishing the requirements for receiving child care assistance. At least 74 percent of children served by the CCDBG program are children of color.¹⁸⁸

Almost every state allows parents with low incomes pursuing education and training to receive child care subsidies. However, with CCDBG funded at a level adequate to serve only one in seven eligible children, some states effectively make families who need child care to pursue education and training a lower priority than families who need child care to work.¹⁸⁹ To help more families of color access education and training, states can make them a priority for receiving child care assistance.

States should also lift additional restrictions on the use of federal child care subsidies to support parents' education and training. About 27 states have established these restrictions, such as limiting the types of degrees parents can pursue, not allowing parents to participate in English as a Second Language programs, imposing time limits, requiring parents to work while in school, and mandating that parents maintain a certain level of performance in their programs.¹⁹⁰

States should also ensure that child care subsidies are available to parents balancing school and work, who may need care during nontraditional hours. With relatively few child care centers open during non-business hours, this may mean that states may need to allow the use of child care subsidies for home-based providers.¹⁹¹

Support services funds

Federal solution: Both federal and state funding can and should be used to provide support services to students and workers pursuing both work-based learning opportunities and career pathway programs at postsecondary institutions. A federal work-based learning support fund would allow workers of color to participate in best practice pre-apprenticeship programs like Project Jumpstart in Maryland. A work-based learning support fund could also provide supports like child care, transportation, and tools to newly placed apprentices during the critical first six to twelve months of employment — a time employers cite as one where additional support is critically needed.¹⁹²

Through the Gateway to Careers Act the federal government can also dedicate funding to support nontraditional students as they pursue career pathways. A career pathways support fund could underwrite adult foundational skills instruction, transportation and child care, emergency



Since child care, transportation, tools, and other supports can be expensive, states should also establish their own work-based learning support funds and career pathways grant programs to help supplement the cost of these supports.

support services, and comprehensive career counseling — supports needed by many students of color to complete career pathways programs and secure in-demand credentials. Currently, there is no dedicated federal funding for these career pathways.¹⁹³

State solution: Since child care, transportation, tools, and other supports can be expensive, states should also establish their own work-based learning support funds and career pathways grant programs to help supplement the cost of these supports. A unique advantage of support funds financed with state dollars is that they can leverage additional federal funds, such as SNAP E&T 50 percent reimbursement grants, discussed previously in this report.¹⁹⁴

9. Remove work requirements and education and training restrictions in public assistance programs

Why this issue matters for racial equity

Racist roots of welfare reform

In 1996, Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The Act transformed cash assistance for families with low incomes, replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

For most of the 20 years preceding the Act's passage, the California Governor and eventual President Ronald Reagan had fabricated and circulated the racist trope of the "welfare queen" — a woman who used multiple fake names and addresses to collect welfare, Social Security, and veterans' benefits to achieve a total tax-free cash income of \$150,000 a year. This fictional villain was loosely based on an actual Black woman from Chicago. However, she was in no way representative of the typical cash welfare recipient — who was White at the time. In fact, there was never a point in which most AFDC recipients were Black.¹⁹⁵

Undoubtedly the welfare queen trope influenced Congressional debate of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Congress implemented work requirements for the newly created TANF program based on the idea that the most cash assistance recipients needed to prove that they were willing to work in order to receive the assistance. Congress also restricted recipients' access to education and training and established time limits for the program.

In states where cash welfare had previously been a federally funded entitlement, Congress effectively capped cash welfare spending in each state by creating a block grant. The Personal Responsibility Act also handed a lot of discretion to the states to structure welfare programs under the block grant.

These changes have drastically reduced the number of people receiving cash assistance and have severely limited the utility of the assistance as a support for people enrolled in education and training. In 1996, for every 100 families living below the poverty line, sixty-eight received modest cash benefits. In 2017, only 23 percent of families with poverty-level incomes received TANF.¹⁹⁶ **Now only 13 percent of TANF funds are spent on work, education and training activities, work supports, and supportive services.** Another 16 percent of TANF funds go to child care and only 23 percent of funds go to provide cash assistance.¹⁹⁷

Welfare reform as a model for other programs

Some state and federal policymakers look to the decrease in the number of people receiving cash assistance benefits as proof that welfare reform was a success. They look to build upon the racist assumptions of welfare reform and replicate the “success” of the program by establishing new work requirements in SNAP, housing assistance programs, Medicaid health insurance, and other public benefit programs.

Even the 1996 welfare reform law expanded work requirements in SNAP. Under the law, adults ages 18 to 50 not living with children are limited to receiving SNAP for only three months in a three-year period, unless they are employed or in a work or training program for at least 20 hours a week. If there are not enough jobs available in local areas, states can sometimes exempt adults within those areas from the time limit’s application. However, states are not obligated to offer a spot in a work or training program to every adult who must comply with this arbitrary requirement, and most do not.¹⁹⁸

Broadly the idea that welfare reform and work requirements constitute “successes” to be replicated is erroneous. Not only did a great number of people lose access to TANF cash assistance, but this **loss in benefits did not result in sustained employment increases or in poverty reduction.** In fact, studies show that employment increases among TANF recipients subject to work requirements were “modest and faded over time.” Specifically, in thirteen random assignment studies, employment among TANF recipients *not* subject to work requirements was the same or higher within five years than employment among TANF recipients subject to work requirements in nearly all of the programs evaluated.¹⁹⁹

Moreover, stable employment among TANF recipients subject to work requirements was the “exception, not the norm.” Where work requirements did result in statistically significant in employment for TANF recipients, only small minority of people were stably employed — defined as employed in 75 percent of the quarters in years three through five of the study of thirteen programs. The share of TANF recipients subject to work requirements who worked stably “ranged in these programs from a low of 22.1 percent to a high of 40.8 percent.”²⁰⁰



Rather than imposing work requirements on people with few financial resources — and putting them at risk of losing food, health care, and housing which make training more possible — federal and state policymakers should focus on strengthening workers' access to education and training aligned with the needs of local and regional employers.

Policy solutions

Remove work requirements in public assistance programs and reject calls for their expansion

To address the racist roots of welfare reform and advance racial equity, state and federal governments should remove existing work requirements in public benefit programs and reject calls for their expansion. Work requirements have not been effective at connecting people to family-supporting jobs or lifting them out of poverty. They can actually be counterproductive, since they encourage workers to take low-wage jobs rather than building skills and credentials that can help them compete in today's economy. There's also no evidence that work requirements help meet employers' need for skilled workers. And they can create red tape for community colleges and training organizations that need flexibility to train people for jobs in our rapidly changing economy.²⁰¹

Specifically, federal policymakers should remove work requirements in TANF²⁰² and SNAP. State policymakers can act on their own to remove some work requirements in SNAP by offering voluntary SNAP E&T programs instead of mandatory ones. State policymakers can also refrain from implementing work requirements for Medicaid health insurance, or they can remove those requirements if they have already started down the road of implementation.

Rather than imposing work requirements on people with few financial resources — and putting them at risk of losing food, health care, and housing which make training more possible — federal and state policymakers should focus on strengthening workers' access to education and training aligned with the needs of local and regional employers. This report includes multiple tools for expanding this access.

Remove restrictions on education and training in public assistance programs

Policymakers should also remove restrictions on education and training in public assistance programs and focus on investing in training opportunities for people instead. For example, federal TANF policy actively discourages participation in training activities by limiting the share of households engaged in education or training that can be counted toward the work participation rate, the states' primary performance measure.²⁰³ Federal policy also limits the duration of time that training can count towards individual work requirements under TANF.²⁰⁴ Some states have also restricted the education and training options that parents can pursue while receiving child care assistance.²⁰⁵ These restrictions should be removed so that people of color have broad access to education, training, and work supports that lead to lasting careers.



Conclusion

National Skills Coalition works toward a vision of America that grows its economy so that every worker, and every industry has the skills to compete and prosper. We acknowledge that ethnic and racial diversity is our strength. However, we as a nation have not treated it that way. In this report, we have documented how for far too long, workers of color and immigrants have not had access to the opportunities to build the skills that they need to compete and prosper because of structurally racist policies. This lack of access to education and training helps fuel a middle-skill gap which hurts people, businesses, and our economy.

To be clear, workforce development is not the sole answer to the struggles experienced by people of color and immigrants. However, workforce training and education are critically important parts of the solution for closing disparities in employment, income, and wealth. We focus on policies specifically because intentional public policy decisions played a key role in forming these disparities, and therefore public policies must be an integral piece of the resolution.

This report has outlined a list of initial ideas to counter structural racism by proactively advancing racial equity in postsecondary education, training, and employment. We hope that this report inspires you to further action. We thank you for your attention to this publication and your future actions because we know that workers of all races and ethnicities must have equitable access to education and training for our country to live up to its true potential.

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