

Appendix 10: Oregon and Colorado Career Guidance and Pathway Models

Oregon's Aspire¹ program is one model that aims to combine online career guidance/exploration with the support of an adult, by offering education, resources, and mentoring (1:1 and group) support to high school students to augment use of the Oregon CIS system. The program also provides activities focusing on career exploration, career and education research, admissions applications, scholarships, and financial aid forms.

The program has grown from a pilot program in a handful of sites to over 170 middle and high schools and community-based organizations over the last 24 years. Overseen by Oregon's Student Access and Completion Office within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission², its mission is to help Oregon's students to become career and college ready in a variety of postsecondary pathways, including apprenticeships, technical schools, college or university degree programs, or community college programs.

The Aspire program brings together schools, community members, families, and postsecondary and industry partners to provide as much information and individual guidance as possible to the students at participating schools. The program trains and supports Aspire site coordinators, mentors, and volunteers in helping students make successful plans for their life after high school, no matter the pathway they choose, by providing resources, recommended activities, reporting tools, in-person and virtual professional development, coaching, and partnership grants for participating sites.

Aspire's 2022-2023 reports shows that nearly 25,000 students received mentoring from over 9,000 volunteer mentors, averaging about 7 hours of mentoring support per student; 86% of sites include community members in the program; 76% of sites communicate with parents about their activities; and between 75% and 79% help students find internships and job shadows or offer career and industry presentations. Nearly 90% of the sites also use career exploration tools such as Oregon's Career Information System (CIS).³ Importantly, Aspire sites have a 52% FAFSA completion rate while non-Aspire sites have a 43.4% rate.

Lack of career awareness is a challenge in Alaska according to industry, individual employers, and economic and workforce development organizations, and education. Educators reported that a critical gap in our school system is the lack of resources for schools to provide dedicated career counselors. Alaska has an online career information and planning tool, AKCIS, but only 10% of student survey respondents used it to find career information; Alaska's FAFSA completion rate is lowest in the nation at just 37%.

The Aspire model blends both online and career information and tools with in-person support and mentoring to provide students with more robust career guidance and increase the state's FAFSA completion rate. It is a model that Alaska might consider in response to the Alaska's Future

¹ Oregon Aspire - <https://oregonstudentaid.gov/aspire/>

² Analogous to Alaska's Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE).

³ Analogous to the Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS).

Workforce Plan’s recommendations to address the state’s lack of career awareness by young people.

Colorado provides an innovative model for career information with its open access website that connects any visitor with comprehensive and usable information about jobs/careers and pathways in the state: <https://www.mycoloradojourney.com/industries>. The website is a model of rapidly available and usable career information. General career information about careers and pathways for 15 industries in the state, including average wages, number of openings, expected growth, training and credentials required, is available to anyone without creation of a user account. More detailed information, such as the training program finder, financial aid search, and personalized career planning tools available with the creation of a free, private, user account.

Colorado is also implementing a new workforce development initiative to bring more connection to existing workforce and education programs and employers who are looking for skilled workers:

1. Grants for businesses and education groups to partner in creating new training programs.
2. Creation of a longitudinal data system to track success in putting students into careers, from early childhood through college programs.
3. Tax credits to businesses to establish apprenticeship programs; grants to expand existing programs; and grants to organizations to function as workforce intermediaries to connect businesses and education programs for apprenticeships.
4. Aligning the work of the community college system and the states apprenticeship agency.
5. Developing a system to evaluate non-degree credentials and provide the means for them to be “stacked” and made part of an individual’s educational record.
6. Tax credits for education for families earning less than \$90,000 annually.

Other Colorado career and workforce development resources include

- Work-based Learning Continuum and other work-based learning resources - (<https://cwdc.colorado.gov/strategies/work-based-learning>)
- Talent Equity Agenda to target resources, raise awareness, and implement strategies to close economic disparities and mitigate racial inequities (<https://cwdc.colorado.gov/talent-equity-agenda>)
- “Building Industry-Driven Career Pathway Systems in Colorado: A Step-by-Step Guide,” focusing on 1) regional, industry-led sector partnerships; 2) regional support teams of other stakeholders such as education, economic development, policy makers, and community-based organizations; 3) identification of occupations critical to local employers; 4) inventorying existing training and education programs; 5) understanding the skills, knowledge, and abilities that industry needs; 6) building career pathway programs to prepare individuals with the necessary competencies; 7) marketing the pathway to a variety of audiences; and 8) creating a system for continuous improvement. (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TiTRgeaacNTro_nyyBP5XxAI9aAS00Zv/view)

Many of Colorado’s initiatives and programs are meant to address some of the same challenges that Alaska’s Future Workforce research found. These programs might be used as models for the ongoing implementation of Alaska’s Future Workforce recommendations.