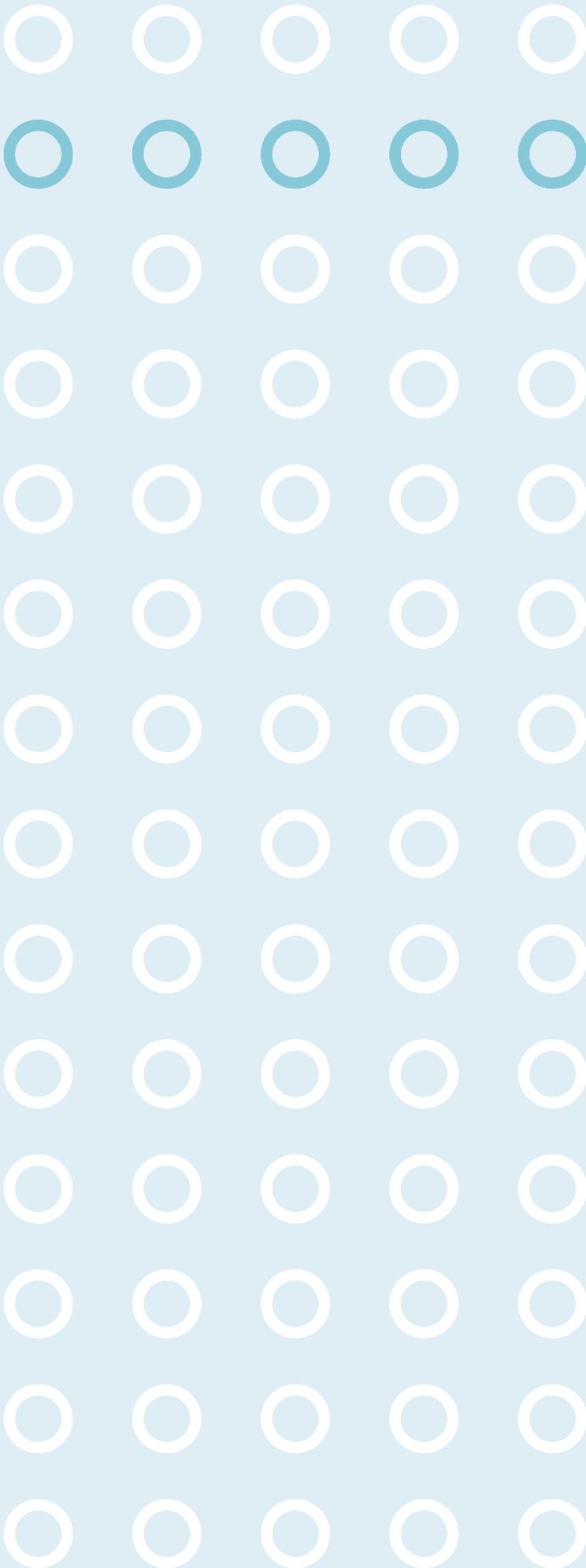# Unlocking the Nation's Potential

A Model to Advance Quality and Equity in Education Beyond High School

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CONTENTS

Strengthening Quality in the Pursuit of Equity

In 2018, Lumina Foundation appointed and convened a Quality Credentials Task Force comprising 22 leaders in education, policy, and workforce development. The task force had two charges. First, it was to explore new ways to assure the quality of a college education and other forms of learning beyond high school. Second, it was asked to develop a broad, conceptual model of credential quality that could lead to the greater equity and quality learning that our society needs and students deserve. The group met three times over the course of one year to develop this report and the new conceptual model of credentialing quality at its core.

In its deliberations, the task force explored the implications of profound changes in the economy, in society, in educational systems and institutions, and in approaches to defining and assessing the quality of college degrees and other credentials earned after high school. By so doing, task force members laid the foundation for an initiative that breaks ground in three important ways. First, it combines into one objective priorities that usually are addressed separately: quality and equity. Second, it creates a sort of reform umbrella — one that covers both institution-based curricular changes and systems reform from federal and state policymakers, accreditors, and associations. Finally, beneath this umbrella, it seeks to enlist the active cooperation of leaders from all of these sectors.

We present the ideas below to facilitate the collaboration that is vital to building an updated, integrated system of quality assurance that will expand access and strengthen equity. We believe this system should help increase credential attainment rates nationally while assuring the quality of the credentials themselves. But we are profoundly committed as well to greater fairness in access to quality credentials for black, Latino, and American Indian students. For decades,

persistent inequities and structural misalignments have caused students of color to earn credentials at rates far lower than that of white students. Also, students of color too often miss opportunities to gain from the highest-quality educational programs and practices. This model is meant to guide efforts to provide high-quality educational opportunities to more individuals and advance racially and economically just outcomes for individuals and society.

We hope these ideas will help expand access to credentials of value in today's world — that is, credentials that open doors to economic opportunity, social mobility, and full civic participation. To effectively meet these demands, every program that leads to a post-high school credential should clearly state what students will learn. And every credential should enable its holder to find meaningful work, grow and learn on the job, and pursue further education.

Lumina created this task force knowing that, while many individuals are earning quality credentials, pernicious inequities persist in access to and success across academic programs. Moreover, even when individuals earn credentials, assessment studies and employer surveys show that many graduates lack the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

The need to update our systems to address these inequities is urgent. We offer this model and these insights so that we may move toward a new learning system that better meets people's needs. We welcome feedback into how the model can be improved and how it can be used to catalyze reforms.

Debra Humphreys, *Vice President of Strategic Engagement, Lumina Foundation*

Paul Gaston, *Trustees Professor Emeritus at Kent State University and consultant for Lumina Foundation*

An increasingly obvious need for improved quality in postsecondary credentials has prompted important efforts to strengthen programs and institutions and to improve the oversight needed to affirm their effectiveness. Similarly, there is a growing consensus that persistent inequities in access to and attainment of high-quality credentials must be addressed. What have not been fully acknowledged are the three closely related priorities that the task force has identified.

First, the task force believes that quality and equity are inextricably linked and that new reform efforts must integrate these priorities. Without improved quality, there can be no meaningful equity. Without improved equity, claims for quality ring hollow. Second, the task force determined that effective reform must link institution-based curricular reform with systems and regulatory reforms from federal and state policymakers, consumer protection agencies, employers, accreditors, and associations; this differs from past, sector-specific approaches. Finally, the task force calls for genuine collaboration among leaders from all of these relevant sectors — the type of engaged cooperation that is essential for any meaningful reform to take root and blossom.

Facing an Urgent Need

The need to expand access to high-quality credentials — traditional college degrees, certificates, certifications, and other non-degree credentials — has become increasingly urgent. We must achieve this priority if we are to address the demands of a competitive global economy and assure more equitable access to economic opportunity, social mobility, and meaningful civic participation.

Unfortunately, our systems and structures for learning beyond high school and for assuring the quality of credentials were built for a different time and a different student population. The current system has served black, Latino, and American Indian students particularly poorly. Aggressive and intentional efforts to build a more fair and just system — one that prioritizes students, quality learning, and equity — are a must.

This report offers a new framework for improving equity and quality in learning beyond high school. Our commitment to assuring and improving quality depends on our commitment to advancing fairness and equity — and vice-versa. In pursuing quality, we recognize the potential for inequity — that efforts to enhance quality may offer advantages to some and

disadvantages to others. In pursuing equity, we recognize the widely varying paths and needs of today's students, and we seek to meet students where they are and help them succeed.

To achieve equity and quality, we must craft reform that helps meet the demands of today's economy and labor force while also meeting the needs of today's students for meaningful employment, satisfying lives, and civic engagement. These goals are urgent not only for individuals who seek credentials beyond high school, but for society as well. It is clearly in the public interest to build the capacity of more individuals to think critically and independently through high-quality learning beyond high school. In fact, only a society that seeks to develop the potential of all its people — while working to eliminate the disadvantages that some face — can sustain a shared sense of purpose, a secure democracy, and a vibrant economic future.

The challenge we confront stems from significant changes in the nation's educational and economic environments. None has appeared overnight. Each has roots in the past. But the acceleration of change in this century has been striking as it relates to students, the employment economy, and the educational community. As such, we must recognize this change and embrace its potential to increase opportunity and success.

Today's Students

Both individually and as a group, today's learners differ in meaningful ways from their 20th century counterparts. On the one hand, their diversity of backgrounds and experience represent a unique opportunity — for them and for the nation. On the other, there is an increasing risk of inequitable educational and economic "tiers," levels of educational opportunity that differ significantly in quality of experience and outcomes.

Unlike yesterday's "traditional" students, who typically were young, unencumbered, and pursuing predictable career paths, **many of today's students are mature learners who often attend college part time. They also confront a variety of emerging, sometimes unprecedented, and often shifting career paths.** For too many students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the expanding landscape of postsecondary education has brought risk rather than opportunity, confusion rather than access, frustration rather than accomplishment.
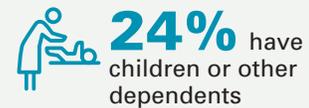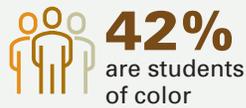
Advancing Quality and Equity

TODAY'S STUDENTS

Most of us envision college students as 18- to 21-year-olds fresh out of high school. That's no longer the reality. Changes in the profile of today's students help explain why so many Americans are failing to earn any sort of postsecondary credential.

WHO THEY ARE

37% are 25 or older

42% are students of color

46% are first-generation college students

24% have children or other dependents

HOW THEY LIVE AND WORK

40% work full time

57% live independently

13% live on campus

36% don't know where their next meal is coming from

THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE

53% of families live at or below twice the poverty level

68% graduate with student loan debt

$25k+ is the average student loan debt

Source: www.luminafoundation.org/todays-student-citations

Those seeking today's credentials are **the most diverse population in history** in terms of race, ethnicity, age, ability, social class, work experience, and educational preparation. Such diversity is both a challenge and a unique opportunity. But the systems and policies that should assure the quality and availability of college-level learning and credentialing have not kept up with the changes.

Today's Economy

Rapid changes in the national and global economy also contribute to our challenge. In an earlier era, an industrial economy powered by large corporations required long-term managers with industry-specific expertise and favored long-term, loyal workers. Today's high-technology, service-based economy seeks creative managers able to navigate multiple sectors — perhaps even multiple industries. It also needs workers who have the knowledge and skills that show

responsive adaptability, just-in-time focus, and technological savvy. From the worker's perspective, an economy that once offered predictable, long-term employment in return for the routine exercise of specified skills has changed dramatically. It's now more likely to offer dynamic opportunities and to focus on short-term effectiveness. Today's employers are also apt to be more interested in an applicant's potential for promotion than in entry-level qualifications alone.

From the perspective of educators and students, what was once a widely shared appreciation for the value of postsecondary education has largely given way to policies that regard such education less as a public good than as an individual benefit. That change has led to dramatic economic consequences. State **funding for public education has been cut sharply,** forcing commensurate increases in tuition and fees. As a result, many students are constrained in their choice of providers and/or face substantial debt.

TODAY'S OPPORTUNITIES

Most of us envision a postsecondary credential leading to economic and social mobility. The reality is that, in today's world, it's tricky to know which credential will lead to which rung of the mobility ladder. Multiple studies point to disconnects between today's new employees and the workplaces they will enter.

WHY A POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL MATTERS

11.5 million net new jobs for workers with postsecondary education

80,000 net new jobs for workers with a high school diploma or less

THE EMPLOYER RECRUITING EXPERIENCE

6.2 million job openings in America are unfilled

73% of employers say finding qualified candidates is somewhat or very difficult

34% of employers say universities have not prepared students for jobs

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK

65% of GenZ jobs don't even exist yet.

47% of U.S. workers hold jobs likely to be automated

Sources: *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have Nots, Center on Education and the Workforce, 2016 — Labor Department Report, June, 2017 — Career Readiness/Skill Survey, Cengage, September 2018 — The Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum, 2016 — "The Future of Employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerization?" Frey and Osborne, University of Oxford*

There are exceptions to these broad trends, of course, but the implications for postsecondary education are clear: Schools, colleges, universities, and other providers must better prepare students for an economy that, while offering more opportunity than ever, also imposes a growing — and ever-changing — list of demands.

Today's Credentialing Landscape

Our third challenge arises in part from how educational providers have responded to these huge economic and demographic changes while coping with fiscal challenges that include unprecedented state disinvestment in public postsecondary education. They have done so with widely varying degrees of success.

Changing economic and workplace demands have led to the creation of new kinds of credentials. As **credentials have proliferated,** opportunities have expanded, but so have grounds for confusion and suspicion. Predatory schools have recruited students, harvested their aid funding, and awarded credentials of dubious value. Other providers, while advertising legitimate career preparation, have relied on curricula and instructional resources that are outdated or fail to align with current employment opportunities. Still other organiza-

tions find it hard to succeed because their business plans are inadequate or outmoded. These institutional inadequacies and failures have left far too many students in the lurch — and that is a genuine tragedy. But another negative result is **increased public skepticism** about the value of postsecondary education and increased suspicion about the motives driving postsecondary education providers.

Employers have expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with the quality of graduates — even those of stable, highly regarded institutions. They often cite a lack of alignment between the priorities of postsecondary education and the needs of a rapidly changing workplace. To address this concern, some credential providers have developed partnerships with employers and have created more transparent and dynamic approaches to the design of programs and the assessment of students' skills and knowledge. But too few programs have moved quickly enough in this direction to restore public confidence.

Many of our existing and new credentials do not "connect" — in two senses. First, individuals may pursue learning opportunities that fail to involve "credit" toward the earning of credentials. Second, individuals who do earn multiple credentials may find it difficult to link them meaningfully along longer lifespans of learning.

Today's Inequities

Inequities in educational funding create unacceptable differences in opportunity. These inequities include varied spending on local school districts, state-by-state differences in per-student allocations to higher education institutions, and wide variations in available public support for students.

While there are many pathways to a postsecondary education, harmful disparities exist within this spectrum. Savvy, well-supported students may find little trouble pursuing postsecondary credentials that demonstrate their readiness for 21st century careers and that prepare them for responsible citizenship and leadership in their communities. However, disadvantaged and inexperienced students are likely to find the environment confusing, rife with risk, and clouded with uncertainty. The result is **an unfairly tiered system.** At one extreme, a tier reserved primarily for the privileged leads to high-quality credentials with long-term positive outcomes. A tier at the other end, which may provide access for more disadvantaged people, too often leads to lower-quality credentials with limited long-term outcomes.
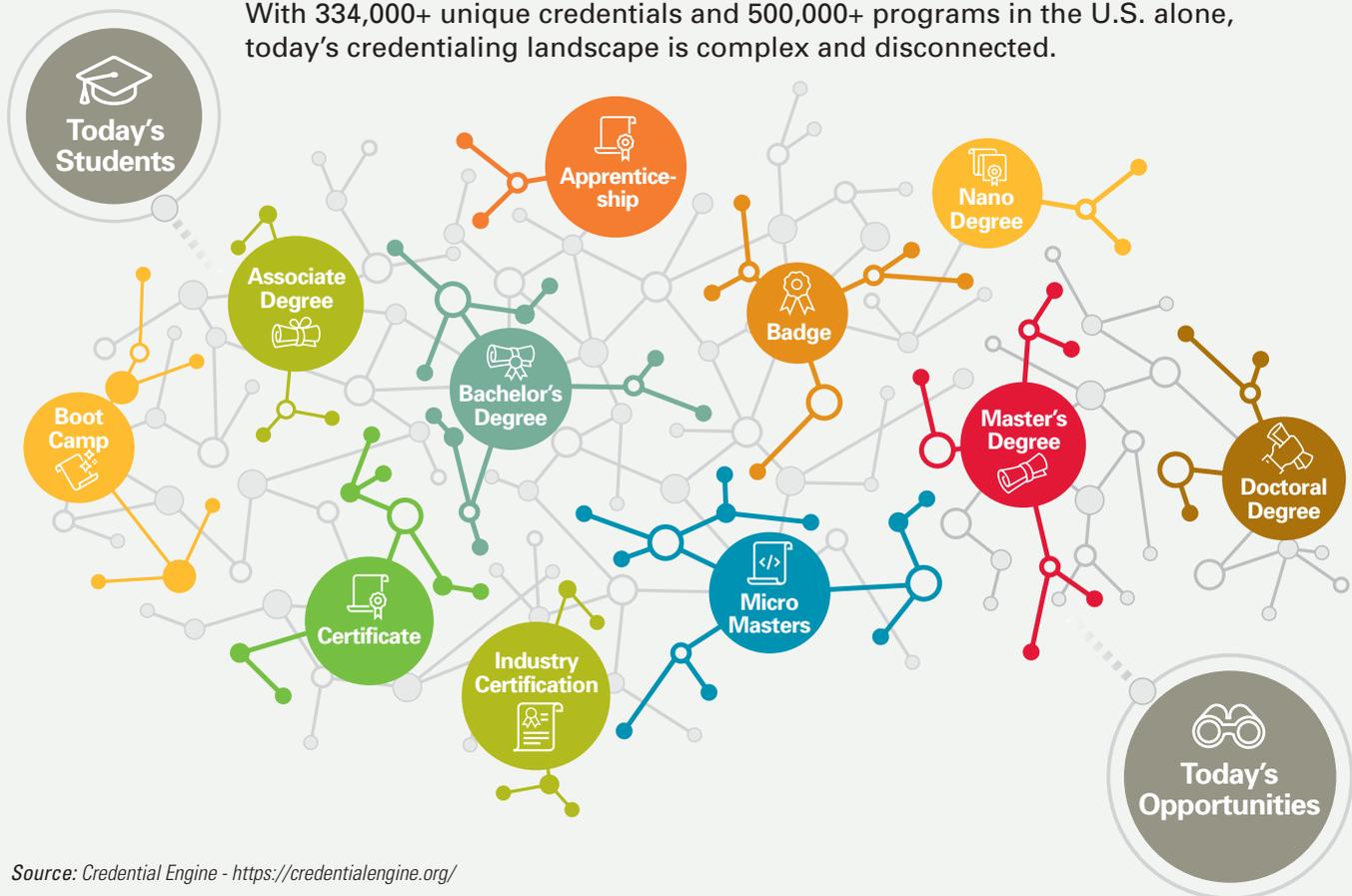
Evaluation Tool Kit

The Education Strategy Group (ESG) has developed a resource meant to be used within states to support evaluation of non-degree credentials. There are four tools in the kit, each available in a customizable version.

For instance, the employer survey tool, which invites extensive customization prior to use, asks that states first draw on (or acquire) detailed information concerning the nature of current employment within particular industries. In turn, responses from employers should provide clear guidance to the state about which credentials are valued and which should be developed.

To learn more, see: http://edstrategy.org/resource/credential-currency/

TODAY'S CREDENTIALING LANDSCAPE

With 334,000+ unique credentials and 500,000+ programs in the U.S. alone, today's credentialing landscape is complex and disconnected.

Today's Students

Apprentice-ship

Nano Degree

Associate Degree

Badge

Boot Camp

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctoral Degree

Certificate

Micro Masters

Industry Certification

Today's Opportunities

Source: Credential Engine - https://credentialengine.org/

Between these extremes are the thousands of students who must navigate a bewildering array of educational options that differ sharply in quality and effectiveness. It is painfully ironic that the students most often hampered by this system are the ones who have most to gain from high-quality learning opportunities beyond high school.

The roots of this two-tier system are easily identified:

- Students now face record-high levels of income inequality and historically low levels of available financial aid. Those who have a secure base of financial support are far more likely to persist and earn a credential than those who feel threatened by inadequate or unpredictable support.

- Strategies for improving the efficiency and reducing the cost of postsecondary education are inequitably distributed. For instance, dual enrollment — taking college-level courses in high school for both high school and college credit — can, when implemented well, accelerate college preparation and reduce students' time to degree completion. But as a 2016 federal study has shown, black and Latino students and students whose parents are not college-educated are much less likely to participate in such programs.

- Expert and attentive advice guiding students to the most appropriate educational paths is far more likely to be available in affluent high schools than in challenged ones. Such guidance is also far more prevalent in prosperous postsecondary institutions than in financially challenged ones.

- Students from low-income backgrounds and some non-white students are less likely than their more privileged peers even to enroll in higher education. And, when they do, they are more likely to attend institutions that have far fewer resources than the institutions that typically serve more privileged students.

Keys to the Solution

We must create a system of learning beyond high school that properly serves all students across their entire learning lifespan. We need a single-tier system that offers assured quality and more equitable access along multiple pathways — all leading to positive outcomes. No credentials awarded in this new system should be dead-ends. The system must support pathways into, across, and through a complex learning and credentialing landscape — pathways that assure equity and quality at every stage.

Of course, the range of educational opportunities will — and should — remain broad. There would be no advantage in radically reducing students' choices even as we use sensible regulations to protect them from predatory actors. Likewise, legitimate differences will — and should — remain among these choices regarding the time required and the outcomes promised. For instance, associate and bachelor's degree programs typically pursue goals that are not sought in short-term, work-based training or in programs leading to more narrowly focused credentials such as licensures and apprenticeships.

Regardless of differences between them, however, the task force believes that all programs must embody **a quality assurance vision for learning and success beyond high school** that prioritizes the success of all students. At a minimum, this system must assure that all credentials have clear and transparent learning outcomes that lead to meaningful employment, to opportunities for further learning, and to satisfying, socially conscious lives.

This new system will show commitment to equity and quality by:

- **Closing racial/ethnic gaps in attainment rates:** While we work to increase attainment rates overall, we must prioritize the effort to close attainment gaps — especially for black, Latino, and American Indian individuals.

- **Assuring quality experiences and outcomes for all students even as we increase attainment rates:** We must guard against approaches that increase attainment rates by providing lower-quality credentials to our most vulnerable students. Credentials must equip learners for a future in which continued learning will be a necessity; they cannot merely prepare learners for current jobs.

- **Balancing the current tiered system to create equitable access to quality:** We must draw on the best features of the existing system to create one that offers equitable access and support to all.

- **Addressing inequities within institutions:** We must address inequities in access to high-quality learning experiences within institutions. Disaggregated data must be analyzed to uncover hidden inequities and to aid in curricular redesign that reflects the history and experience of all learners.

- **Advancing student-centered policy change:** Our current system is backward in the way it supports institutions that serve large numbers of students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students. These institutions receive less funding from a variety of sources than do institutions that generally serve more wealthy and privileged students. We must create policies that ensure equitable resources and equitable access to quality learning that leads to student success.

Strengths to Build on in the Face of Clear Challenges

While the challenges are great, we are the beneficiaries of those who have already led important efforts in this area. Significant work has been done to clarify learning outcomes, to restructure curricula to achieve those outcomes through active and engaged learning, and to assess results in ways that lead to genuine improvement. In our work, task force members have drawn on three important sources of national leadership:

- A national dialogue, led by faculty members and employers, about the competencies or learning outcomes that students will need to succeed in the workforce and to solve urgent problems in society.

- A broadly shared commitment to active learning practices that promote the success of underserved students.

- An impressive array of quality reform initiatives across all sectors of postsecondary education, including 1.) the ongoing shift from "counting credits" to documenting accomplishment of competencies and 2.) the redesign of curricula to offer clear pathways linking specialized knowledge with broader learning.

TODAY'S INEQUITIES

Education and training after high school is the surest path to economic stability and opportunity. Yet the promise of American opportunity has always been undercut by a legacy of discrimination and oppression.

EDUCATION

45% of black and American Indian students from low-income families delay starting college vs. 32% of similar white students

11% of young adults from low-income families earn bachelor's degrees by age 24, compared with 57% from high-income families

70% of black students who earn bachelor's degrees and have student loan debt could end up in default

85% of blacks, **69%** of whites **66%** of Latinos, and **45%** of Asian Americans graduate with loan debt

PUBLIC FUNDING

38% of two-year college students are people of color. Community colleges receive the lowest revenue per student annually

The per-student expenditure averages are **$16,512** at two-year public institutions, **$44,965** at four-year public institutions, and **$58,794** at four-year private nonprofit institutions

WORK + EARNINGS

Compared to white individuals, black individuals are twice as likely to be unemployed, and earn nearly **25%** less when employed

Average wealth of white families was more than **$500,000** higher than that of black families in 2013; whites in 2015 earned $25.22 hourly, on average, compared with $18.49 for blacks

Sources: https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/discrimination-job-market-united-states
https://equitablegrowth.org/how-rising-u-s-income-inequality-exacerbates-racial-economic-disparities/
https://www.nextavenue.org/retirement-crisis-facing-african-americans/
Scott-Clayton, J. (2018)

Capitalizing on Strengths to Reduce Equity Gaps

In sum, faculty members, higher education associations, accreditors, and employers have achieved notable gains. In these "best of times," savvy students are likely to benefit from all of the advances mentioned above: well-designed pathways, active learning, informed advising, adequate financial resources, and a head start gained through carefully monitored dual enrollment in high school. Such students enjoy unparalleled educational opportunity. Choosing institutions and programs of documented quality, they encounter engaging curricula that help them build the knowledge, skills, and capacities that lead to rewarding careers and satisfying lives.

We recognize, however, that much more needs to be done to improve federal and state oversight and bolster efforts to hold institutions and programs accountable for how well they serve today's students and advance equitable outcomes. Counter to the positive picture described above, far too many students continue to experience an environment that reflects few of the needed reforms.

For such students, in fact, it remains the worst of times. Talented but less informed students are likely to face pressing obligations with limited resources and insufficient support. They may struggle because they lack high-quality experiences in K-12 education. They may face a bewildering array of choices — or, because they lack knowledge or resources, few choices at all. They risk losing time and money along educational paths that lead to disappointment.

The stark contrast between these two perspectives is clearly a national dilemma, but it's also a national opportunity. To capitalize on that opportunity — to realize this broad vision and model of quality — reforms are needed at multiple levels — in federal and state policy, in accreditation, and in institutions and systems. This report doesn't seek to lay out a specific reform agenda for each sector, but we offer this model as a starting point for that effort.

On one side of the gap we find effective institutions, strong programs, and successful students — all of which suggests that total reinvention isn't necessary. In many respects, successful, evidence-based approaches are already being implemented — though hardly at scale. We have highlighted a few examples of emerging good practice throughout this report.

But on the other side of the gap we are likely to find unscrupulous or financially struggling providers, dead-end programs, frustrated employers, and thwarted learners. In this report, we seek to recognize the gaps and opportunities — and to propose a vision of quality that can help us build a more student-centered system. This is urgent work for each of us

because **all students deserve access to high-quality educational programs** that lead to meaningful opportunity.

Meeting this challenge will, of course, involve work from many individuals and institutions — students, faculty, college and university leaders, regulatory agencies, employers, opinion leaders, philanthropies, and policymakers. All bear some responsibility for the problem's growth, and all must now help solve it. The recommendations we offer must therefore be multifaceted and consider all significant actors. The challenge is complicated, but we address it with two straightforward goals in mind: We seek both clear improvements in quality and quality assurance and clear gains in equity. What's more, we are convinced that we must achieve both in order to attain either. First and foremost, we must start from a clear conception of quality — in all its facets.

Using this Report and Framework

We have tried to structure this document and the new conceptual model so that they can assist the people positioned to change policy and practice — regardless of their respective roles, their region, or their stake in the system.

As mentioned, the model reflects several national reform initiatives that have made significant progress in defining the competencies needed for success in today's world. Many such initiatives have led to new curricular designs and evidence-based teaching and learning practices. In the light of such progress, this model will reveal touchstones related to proven strategies developed by faculty members to improve student success. We also have endorsed efforts to move beyond counting credits and ensure that students are developing core competencies. Such efforts have prompted laudable examples of faculty members intentionally redesigning programs with these competencies in mind.

If this model is to support and accelerate these reform efforts, we know it can't be a "one-way" presentation. And so we present this framework to begin a dialogue. We raise questions that have not been fully answered and propose strategies that may be seen as tentative — all in pursuit of a positive vision that requires the collaborative effort of many.

We hope you find the document useful and that you will join us in working toward quality and equity in learning beyond high school.

While the landscape of credentialing is becoming more complex, the members of the Lumina Quality Credentials Task Force believe that **we can do better to assure more equitable access to quality credentials across the entire landscape**. A model that maps what a quality credential really is and describes what it takes to produce one can offer an essential starting point to guide reform.
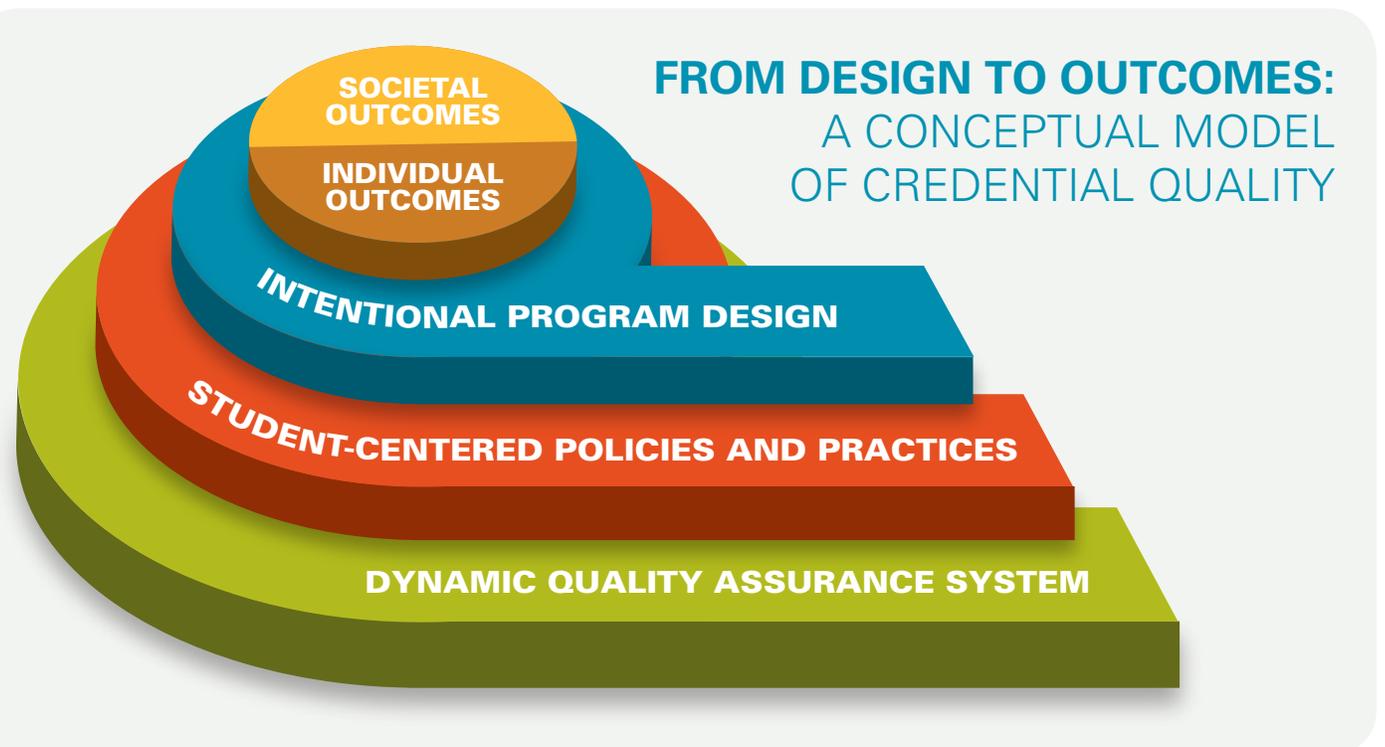
Research clearly shows that increasing attainment of credentials beyond high school produces significant positive outcomes — for individuals and for communities, states, and society as a whole. We have developed a model (see below) that operates on three levels. The model maps from the individual and societal outcomes that we know high-quality credentials can produce back to the intentional program design and student-centered policies and practices that assure the system actually does produce those outcomes.

This model acknowledges that, because different credentials have distinctive goals and may generate distinctive outcomes, they may require distinctive standards to determine their quality. For instance, bachelor's degrees certainly have broader goals for learning than do shorter-term credentials designed to meet specific workforce-training needs. Such goals typically include the preparation of graduates for success in work and for civic participation and leadership in a diverse democracy.

Given the spectrum of credentials today, this model does not mandate specific criteria. Rather, it is meant to point the way to practices and quality indicators that can be shared across different credentials and that can help educators knit together different credentials.
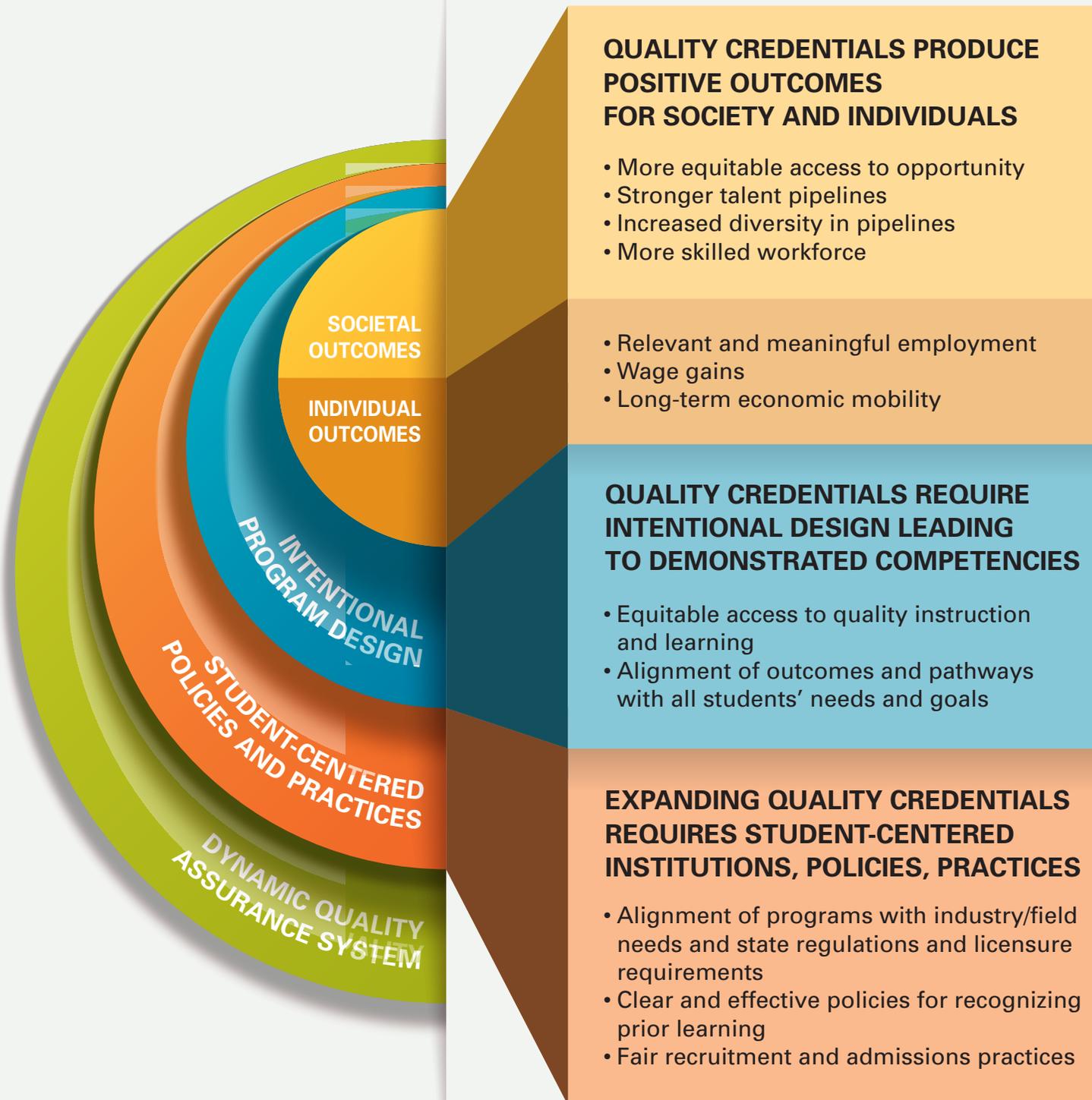
The model also strongly emphasizes institutional policies and priorities that correlate with significantly higher levels of student persistence and credential attainment. These practices include many that have been developed by faculty members to provide active, culturally competent, and supportive teaching and learning. Increasingly, effective teaching and curricular redesign feature such high-impact practices as community-based research, reflective writing, and problem-based learning.

SOCIETAL OUTCOMES

INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES

INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

STUDENT-CENTERED POLICIES AND PRACTICES

DYNAMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

FROM DESIGN TO OUTCOMES:
A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF CREDENTIAL QUALITY

Practice

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF CREDENTIAL

SOCIETAL
OUTCOMES

INDIVIDUAL
OUTCOMES

INTENTIONAL
PROGRAM DESIGN

STUDENT-CENTERED
POLICIES AND PRACTICES

DYNAMIC QUALITY
ASSURANCE SYSTEM

QUALITY CREDENTIALS PRODUCE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUALS

- More equitable access to opportunity
- Stronger talent pipelines
- Increased diversity in pipelines
- More skilled workforce

- Relevant and meaningful employment
- Wage gains
- Long-term economic mobility

QUALITY CREDENTIALS REQUIRE INTENTIONAL DESIGN LEADING TO DEMONSTRATED COMPETENCIES

- Equitable access to quality instruction and learning
- Alignment of outcomes and pathways with all students' needs and goals

EXPANDING QUALITY CREDENTIALS REQUIRES STUDENT-CENTERED INSTITUTIONS, POLICIES, PRACTICES

- Alignment of programs with industry/field needs and state regulations and licensure requirements
- Clear and effective policies for recognizing prior learning
- Fair recruitment and admissions practices

QUALITY

- Better employee retention
- Increased GDP
- More — and more equitable — civic and democratic engagement

- Fewer social welfare needs
- Global competitiveness and leadership
- Improved public health and safety

- Pathways to promotion
- Pathways to additional credentialing
- Intergenerational success

- Improved health and well-being
- Broader civic involvement and leadership

- Process for competency/curricular updates
- Student readiness alignment
- Competencies that are relevant, aligned, transparent, and portable

- Relevant and authentic assessments demonstrating achievement of competencies
- Investment in faculty quality and development

- Evidence-based and culturally competent practices for teaching and learning
- Evidence-based models for developmental education
- Equity-minded policies and practices for advising and student success

- Transparency about outcomes and paths to further learning
- Transparency about financial aid and cost of programs
- Institutional stability and trust

Note: This model was inspired by the work of Michelle Van Noy, Heather McKay, and Suzanne Michael, as detailed in their report, *Non-Degree Credential Quality: A Conceptual Framework to Guide Measurement.*

USING KEY INDICATORS

We know that better designs, policies and practices are key to the overall quality of programs and the credentialing system. But we also need a select set of key indicators that we can use to assess programs and assure credentials' quality.

SOCIETAL OUTCOMES

INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES

INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

STUDENT-CENTERED POLICIES AND PRACTICES

DYNAMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

TO IMPROVE PROGRAMS AND ASSURE QUALITY

Indicators are also necessary to establish criteria for providing resources to the institutions best positioned to provide high-quality educational experiences equitably and award high-quality credentials. Indicators — disaggregated and tracked over time — are also needed to weed out providers that offer low-quality experiences and/or produce few positive outcomes. See below for a limited set of indicators that align with the different components of the conceptual model.

OUTCOMES INDICATORS

- Program-level employment outcomes
- Licensure pass rates
- Attendees' economic mobility rates
- Graduates' economic mobility rates
- Graduates' civic engagement rates
- State and regional workforce alignment/results

- Program-level debt repayment relative to average wages and/or default rates
- State or regional economic development results
- Student progression, time to degree, and graduation rates
- Learning outcome assessment results

DESIGN INDICATORS

- Clear and accessible program and institutional learning outcomes
- Third-party validation of competency achievements

- Equitable opportunities for both applied and theoretical learning
- Competency-assessment results disaggregated and used for improvement

POLICY AND PRACTICE INDICATORS

- Institutional financial health and stability
- Sound governance policies and practices
- Responsible marketing and recruitment
- Equity-minded hiring practices
- Equity-minded, evidence-based strategies for advising and student success

- Clear and effective policies for recognizing prior learning
- Educator professional development aligned with evidence-based and culturally competent teaching and learning
- Equitable participation rates in high-impact educational practices

Priority Competencies in a Dynamic Global Economy

While many indicators may affirm that a credential beyond high school is of high quality, one of the most important is an indicator certifying that the credential holder has attained important core competencies. These skills and abilities, essential for success in today's workplace and for meeting the responsibilities of citizenship in our increasingly complex democratic society, include critical thinking, ethical reasoning, civic awareness, and discernment in the analysis of information.

To ensure attainment of these core competencies, programs must provide repeated opportunities for students to practice skills such as analytical reasoning, communication, ethical decision making, and collaboration with diverse peers. Such skills, highly valued by employers, provide a foundation for continued learning in school, work, civil society, and life. To be clear, these core competencies can be taught in both degree and non-degree programs.

As institutions design pathways to high-quality credentials, educators must focus on the changing needs of the workplace. They must partner with employers and other external stakeholders to make sure their programs and credentials keep up with a dynamic economy and society.

When designing programs, educators must emphasize students' acquisition of core competencies. In turn, students' work in pursuit of such competencies should invite assessment of their achievement and of program effectiveness.

Educators can use a number of tools when building core competencies into credential pathways. Several national learning outcomes frameworks have been built with input from employers and researchers on industry and workforce trends. These frameworks — including the Degree Qualifications Profile and the Beta Credentials Framework — can help faculty members design high-quality degree programs that knit together different learning experiences and connect different kinds of credentials into meaningful and multiple learning pathways.

One powerful source of information is real-time labor market data. One company examining the implications of this data is Burning Glass Technologies. Researchers there have drawn on information from current job postings to develop a set of core competencies (see Page 17). Their research suggests that credential holders who demonstrate these competencies have access to more open positions and command salary premiums.

One can see that these "foundational skills" are an interesting mix. The list includes outcomes that have long been central to quality liberal education degrees and that are important for exercising the responsibilities of citizenship in a diverse democracy. The list also features several new capacities — skills that are important for success in a world dominated by data, technology, and collaborative problem-solving. Again, these foundational skills should be embedded in the intentional design of both degree and non-degree credentials.

In fact, as individuals move along credential pathways, they will increase their chance for post-graduation success by attaining as many of these foundational skills as possible. Still, pathways must embody clear intent.

Clear Intent in Program Design

The following examples, from among many we could have chosen, suggest an important trend: Increasingly, educators recognize that students learn faster and better when a program's intended learning outcomes are clearly stated and pursued with clear and consistent intent. These examples also illustrate ways that faculty members can knit together different credentials and learning pathways. Not surprisingly, this recognition informs the expectations of accrediting associations. They can and should learn from the experience of accredited institutions and programs while providing incentive for effective performance and oversight that affirms the quality of that performance.

Utah State University (USU) has used both discipline-specific learning frameworks (the Tuning process) and a degree-level framework (the Degree Qualifications Profile, or DQP) to integrate general education and the major in an effective (and more economical) curriculum that leads students toward a more coherent and intentional degree. The work began at the department level (Tuning) before moving to the institutional level (the DQP) — a pragmatic model for institutional change. The DQP then served as an interface between the

THE NEW FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS FOR THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Human Skills
- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Analytical Skills

Digital Building Blocks
- Managing Data
- Analyzing Data
- Software Development
- Computer Programming
- Digital Security and Privacy

Business Enablers
- Communicating Data
- Digital Design
- Project Management
- Business Process

various parts of the curriculum to enable students to become "USU Citizen Scholars." The intersection of DQP and Tuning created, in the words of an administrator, "a touchstone we continuously refer back to in our work." Other elements of that work now include a redesigned first-year program, known as Connections, which prepares all students to be intentional learners. Majors are "backward-mapped" from degree-level outcomes to determine what the major contributes to student achievement of the USU degree profile and to identify educational opportunities that should be provided by other units within USU. Additionally, a collaboration between advising and the library allowed for the creation of "interactive mind maps" to help students navigate the curriculum. In short, integrated use of Tuning and the DQP effectively shifted campus conversations toward collaboration, coherence, and intentional integration.

At the **University of South Florida** (USF), the list of foundational skills compiled by Burning Glass Technologies was used to map gaps between the learning objectives in the College of Arts and Sciences and the preparation graduates need for the world of work. This is but one example of a growing trend aimed at achieving two goals: to graduate students who are ready for employment and to encourage employers' confidence that USF graduates have the competencies they require. The process is helping to make connections between specific degree programs and the jobs that graduates of those programs seek. At first, faculty members were skeptical. But the process of documenting the gaps between degree requirements and job readiness and providing a clear strategy for addressing those gaps has prompted the faculty to make changes and strengthened the preparation of Arts and Sciences students.

Seeking a closer alignment between its mechatronics program and the needs of local employers, **North Central State College** in Mansfield, Ohio, converted employer job descriptions into competency statements that faculty could use in course planning. Using the Beta Credentials Framework, they clarified expectations in terms of knowledge and skills and thus were able to identify gaps in the curriculum and improve instructional design. The result has been improved sequencing of content, more effective integration of employability skills in the learning experience, and more persuasive demonstration of competencies as part of assessment. Also, the profiling process has helped faculty members identify competency milestones that, when reached, may qualify students for specific industry credentials. Through this strategy, even students who don't complete the program may qualify for jobs and for eventual re-entry into the program.

National Louis University (Chicago and other locations) used the DQP learning framework to create the curriculum for its Harrison Professional Pathways Program. Designed to meet the needs of students who qualify for college but may be less likely to enroll and succeed, the curriculum seeks to provide an innovative, student-centered, technology-enhanced bachelor's degree at an affordable cost. The model offers flexible pathways featuring personalized instructional approaches well supported by appropriate technology. Career preparation is embedded throughout, and every student is aided by a success coach and a collaborative team of instructors and staff. Also, weekly reports are generated, enabling instructors to review and respond to student performance. Due to the success of the program, the DQP is now used institution-wide as the common learning outcomes framework for all courses and content.

The **University of Wisconsin System** has created a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (B.A.A.S.) degree, which is offered at several four-year campuses through a partnership joining the system's branch campuses and institutions in the Wisconsin Technical College System. Students from a UW branch campus may enroll in another pathway designed to allow them to complete a bachelor's degree. Additionally, the B.A.A.S. creates a new pathway for students from technical and career-focused studies. With the new degree, UW faculty have removed barriers for students in technical programs by erasing the longstanding divisions between so-called "terminal degrees" — programs not designed for transfer to a four-year program — and studies that can lead to a bachelor's. Sometimes described as an inverted or "upside-down degree," the B.A.A.S. follows the DQP in recognizing applied studies as a necessary component of any four-year degree. Students

who hold technical degrees can transfer their credits to a four-year institution and then "fill out" their B.A.A.S. studies with relevant general education courses and a major in a subject taught by the degree-granting institution. Upending the notion that broad learning should come before specialized learning, the model shows how job-related credentials can be "laddered" into broader degrees.

Moving from Conceptual Models and Indicators to Results

A focus on quality credentials offered in an equitable environment must also acknowledge the dynamic nature of that environment. Learners don't simply earn credentials, they use them to pursue opportunities. A commitment to equity must therefore also include an awareness of standards and practices that bear on the real-life, "transactional" nature of credentials.

In short, students who earn high-quality, competency-based credentials from supportive institutions still must present themselves and their credentials in the marketplace. There they are likely to encounter beliefs and behaviors, more often implicit than explicit, that will influence the evaluation of their credentials and affect their success.

For example, those who earn widely recognized credentials from long-established institutions may benefit from positive assumptions about those credentials. Others who present innovative but unfamiliar credentials offered by less prominent institutions may face negative assumptions. The issue may be less the quality of the particular credential than the validity of these longstanding, often untested assumptions.

Because such assumptions can powerfully influence an individual's success, those who seek equity must acknowledge

and address the inherent inequities here. These inequities arise from the subtle authority of powerful intangibles, including institutional eminence and society's familiarity with particular credentials.

Greater transparency about credentials is emerging, thanks to efforts such as Credential Engine and other state-level reporting projects. Such efforts should help reduce these distortions in the marketplace. Still, institutions and employers share a responsibility to create a level playing field for credentials of commensurate quality and appropriateness. Ongoing review of standards and regulations can ensure that newly developed credentials get appropriate recognition. Endorsements by industry or field bodies, as well as third-party validations, can attest to the value of newer credentials and those offered by competent but less prominent providers.

From Aspirational Vision to Pragmatic Policy Implementation

Task force members are aware that putting this model into practice will require a commitment to reforms and to the necessary resources. As we consider our broad goals to advance both quality and equity, we must recognize the challenges that institutions face in implementing this ideal model and serving all students well. We know wide disparities exist in the allocation of resources to different kinds of institutions, including those that serve large numbers of black, Latino, and American Indian students. Still, our equity imperative requires that appropriate time and resources be committed — and that they align with the needs of today's students.

We offer, then, this framework as an aspirational one. Through it, we seek to start a dialogue about the resources, practices, and policies needed to translate this framework into a system that works for all students.

We also know that different entities involved in quality assurance and improvement have different responsibilities and may need to pay attention to different indicators in different ways. An institution can set aspirational goals for the design of programs and the outcomes sought for students. Policymakers at the state and federal levels, however, may be more interested in setting minimum standards using a select number of indicators — perhaps for use in allocating funds or determining requirements to offer credentials in a state.

Whether working to move a program or institution toward an aspirational vision or to set appropriate benchmarks for access to resources, we hope this model serves as a useful starting point. We hope it can show how different parts of the system can and should work together to produce the quality learning that we as a society seek and that individuals need to succeed.

Today's modern student life cycle represents far more than a series of interactions with a single institution. In the new credentialing landscape, students are far more likely to engage with many different types of providers. It's no longer enough to assess undergraduate progression and completion through a single institutional lens. Students — as well as those who advise them and those charged with protecting their interests — must now consider additional critical decision-making components such as transparency of outcomes, portability of learning, and transferability of credits and credentials.

In the accompanying illustration, we consider what it means to deliver an equitable, accessible, responsive, and accountable high-quality postsecondary education to today's students. In the model, we align five distinct but interconnected stages of credential completion as part of a pathway system that allows students to enter the workforce and then, if necessary or desired, re-enter the system for additional learning, training, or credentialing. Students who truly understand the time, effort, and investment required for different credentials will be able to choose wisely and make their commitments knowingly.

We also recognize that helping to inform student choice isn't the only solution to improved quality assurance. Federal and state regulators must assure that students are making those choices in an environment that protects their interests and prevents their exploitation by low-quality or predatory institutions. Only such an environment can express adequately the first priority of postsecondary education: student success.

Students need better consumer-protection regulation and information to make informed choices. In this illustration, we flip the conceptual model for credential quality found on Pages 12 and 13 and present a student view. By asking the right questions, students and those advising and/or protecting them through regulations will help ensure that providers meet students' needs, create better experiences, and improve outcomes.

QUALITY IN THE MODERN LIFE CYCLE OF LEARNING

GOAL SETTING

DISCOVERY

Today's Students
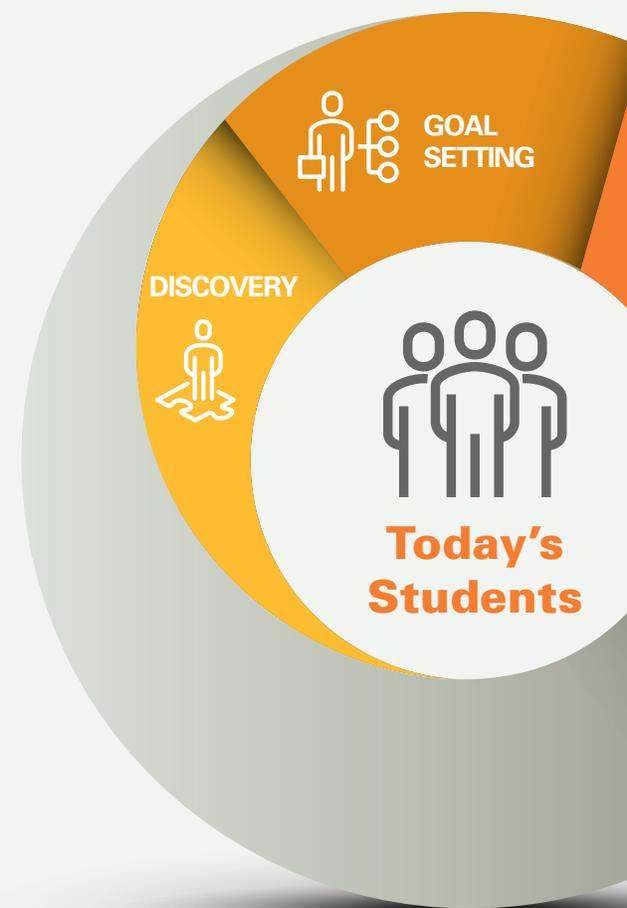
ACCESS + ENTRY/RE-ENTRY
Practices and policies assure and expand access to high-quality pathways and credentials regardless of race, class, age, or geography.
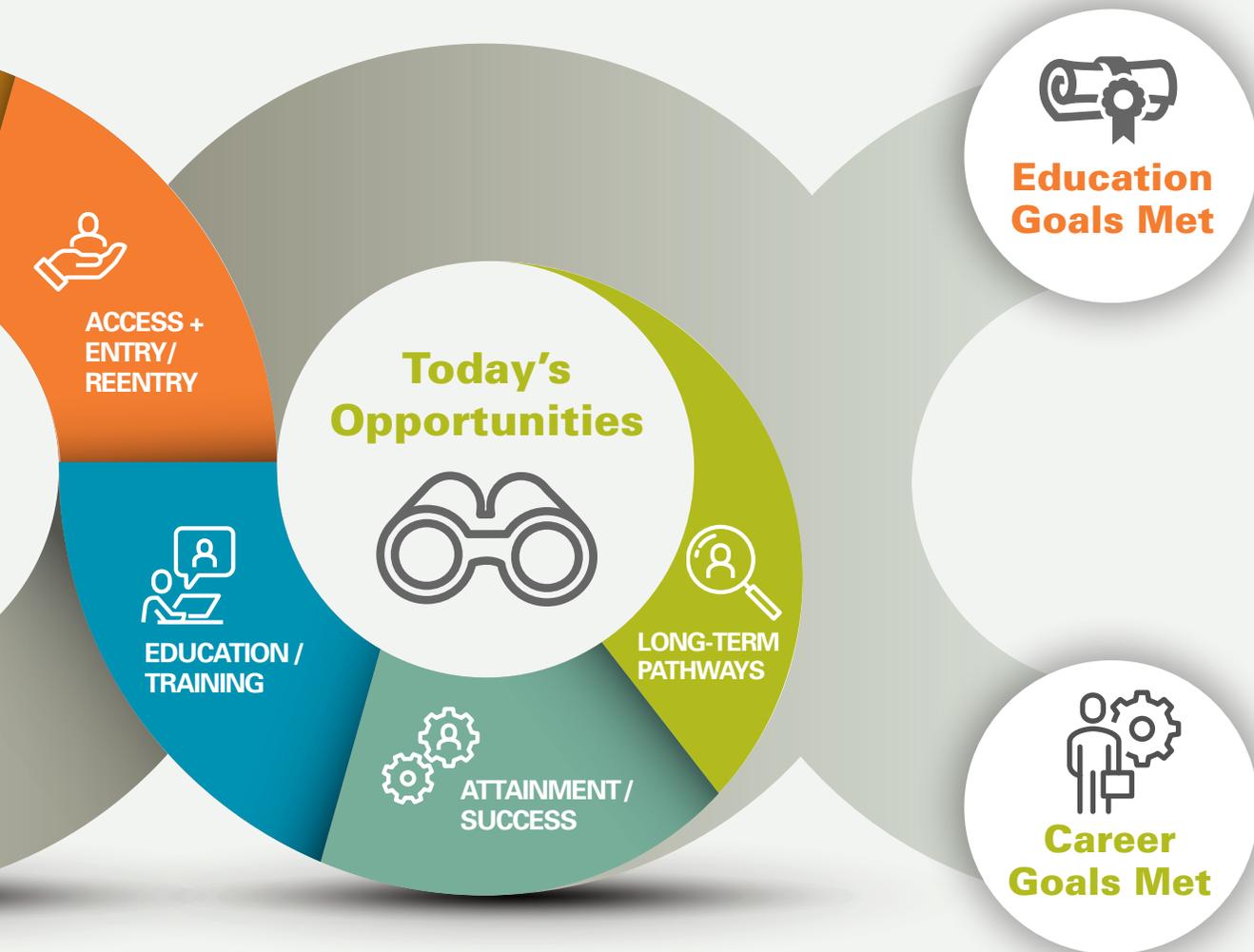
DISCOVERY + GOAL SETTING
Providers clearly and fully describe all programs and credential pathways, including estimates of the time and effort required and the expected return on that investment.

LONG-TERM PATHWAYS
Clear pathways to additional preparation, learning and credentialing are readily accessible, leading to employment, advancement and/or promotion.

Education Goals Met

ACCESS + ENTRY/ REENTRY

Today's Opportunities

EDUCATION / TRAINING

LONG-TERM PATHWAYS

ATTAINMENT / SUCCESS

Career Goals Met

EDUCATION + TRAINING
Credentialing pathways along the entire educational continuum meet the diverse needs of today's students.

ATTAINMENT + SUCCESS
The skills and knowledge base required for success in a chosen field are developed to meet the diverse needs of today's workforce.

A STUDENT VIEW OF CREDENTIALING QUALITY

DISCOVERY + GOAL SETTING

What this means to students:
- Students have access to clear and connected information about the credential.
- The potential value of the credential (e.g., the post-graduation outcomes of those who have previously earned the credential being sought).
- The alignment of the credential with employer expectations and needs in the workforce.
- How the credential will lead to more meaningful employment or more generous wage gains.
- The cost of the credential and the availability of aid, including grants and loans.
- Loan repayment options and rates among prior students.

ACCESS + ENTRY/RE-ENTRY

What this means to students:
- Trust that the provider is relying on fair recruitment and admissions practices.
- Trust that the credential they seek is relevant and worthy of future employment or promotion.
- An understanding of the competencies they will need to develop in order to earn the credential.
- Commitment by the provider to ensure the student is ready to embark on the credentialing journey.
- Commitment by the provider to "count" any relevant past credentials and prior learning they bring to the table.
- An understanding of the rates at which past students graduate in a timely manner with the credential they are seeking.

EDUCATION + TRAINING

What this means to students:
- Learning environments are aligned to, and accommodate, individual needs and goals.
- Relevant 21st century educational practices are followed.
- Knowledgeable and culturally competent professionals will guide their learning journey.
- Relevant support services are provided to help them complete the program and earn a credential.
- An understanding of how achievement will be demonstrated and how academic work will be assessed and judged.

ATTAINMENT + SUCCESS

What this means to students:
- Trust that their attained skills and abilities align with relevant opportunities in the workforce.
- Records representing learning outcomes and competencies are clear to the student and to the employer.
- Employers and future educational institutions trust the credential earned.

LONG-TERM PATHWAYS TO FURTHER LEARNING

What this means to students:
- Trust that shorter-term credentials with clear market value can be easily built upon to attain more advanced jobs and higher wages.
- Trust that first-wave credentials are recognized as high quality, easily enabling smooth transfer to higher levels of education and other types of providers.

No single actor or sector can design, build, implement, and maintain the student-centered quality assurance and improvement system we believe to be necessary — and overdue. A wide range of actors will need to contribute, including accreditors, educators, employers, federal agencies, institutions and systems, states, students, philanthropic organizations, and workforce boards. Each of these actors will have its own role to play and will need to work readily and effectively with the others.

The necessity for increasing collaboration and coordination has been a consistent and enduring theme in quality-improvement discussions. We hope to advance the conversation by identifying a few concrete places to start. Task force members have identified **five priority areas** where collaboration and coordination would create the most positive impact for students.

Area 1 ○

Generate and Use Strong Data Sets

1

Many different public and private actors collect and control different parts of the data set implied by the conceptual model of credentialing on Pages 12 and 13. And each of these actors has unique purposes and interests for doing so — in addition to different privacy and security obligations, particularly when personally identifiable data are involved.

The goal may not be to create a massive new single database with all quality indicators neatly gathered. However, different actors, including the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, can play proactive roles in data collection and use. And various actors can use data sets to facilitate stronger collaboration, reduce duplication, enhance decision-making, and provide a level playing field for non-credit credentials. Because they create disincentives for education providers to offer non-credit credentials, current performance metrics systems do not meet evolving social and economic needs.

- A governor or State Higher Education Executive Officer (SHEEO) could convene a meeting of all public agencies that touch postsecondary education and workforce development. Health and human services, for example, could join postsecondary and workforce bodies to discuss students' use of public benefits, health care outcomes in areas with higher or lower attainment rates, and current workforce needs in the health care sector. This group could identify which entities have access to data on various elements of the conceptual model, assess the state's record from the perspective of each entity, and discuss how shared goals and metrics might improve the state's ability to meet its attainment goals. The same governor or SHEEO could complement this intra-governmental effort by comparing and discussing goals and metrics with the state's current and prospective employers.

- Employers could invite leaders, faculty members, and students from neighboring institutions to discuss their respective views on the strengths and weaknesses of the talent pipeline. The discussion could be sector-specific, local, regional, or even national in scope, depending on the context and needs of the community. And it could be initiated by — and/or facilitated by — any of the stakeholders.

- Accrediting bodies could convene federal, state, and institutional outcomes data experts to develop guidance for providers on the types and sources of data needed for the review process. This could also inform the effort to better align accreditation reporting requirements with those for federal and state data reporting. Additionally, the process could include training for peer reviewers on what data to expect, how to interpret outcomes, and how to pair those outcomes with other sources of information to assess an institution's or program's quality.

Area 2 ○ ○

Operationalize a Commitment to Quality and Equity

2

The commitment to serve all students well and to close outcomes gaps between different racial and ethnic groups is a key first step. But educators, accreditors, and others must do more. They must develop new relationships, welcome and respond to new perspectives, and commit to the long-term effort required to correct these historical wrongs and create a brighter future for all. Some steps toward this broader effort might include the following:

- In addition to data sharing, accreditors could focus on disaggregating data so as to examine trends for different groups of students, including by race and ethnicity.

- Student coalitions, civil rights organizations, or organizations serving communities of color could invite state, federal, or institutional decision-makers to share their perspectives on quality and equity. This dialogue could clarify highlights and areas for improvement. Ideally, such gatherings could launch sustained relationships and elevate voices that, though often unheard or ignored in the past, are central to defining success.

- A state higher education or workforce agency could (a) disaggregate quality indicators such as program-level employment outcomes, licensure pass rates, program-level debt repayment, and average wages to document differences among racial and ethnic groups and (b) invite practitioners, advocates, and students to reflect on possible causes and propose solutions.

- An accreditor, state, or state system could share practices for applied and theoretical learning that have improved outcomes for students of color.

- Providers of high-quality prison education programs, work-based learning opportunities, and more traditional programs could share strategies.

- Institutions, accreditors, and state agencies should examine long-term educational outcomes to determine which credential pathways best foster long-term economic mobility — and which should be re-examined.

- By collaborating with employers, military leaders, and other key education providers outside the traditional higher education system, a state legislature or agency could set clearer, more robust expectations for the transfer of credit and prior learning at public institutions. This effort could create opportunities for students not yet in a pathway and enable those who have already earned significant credits toward a recognized credential to obtain that credential. For the latter effort, a state may need to analyze and aggregate credit earned across different providers and institutions. Private institutions and nontraditional providers could enhance this effort by adding their own data to state systems. Accreditors could aid this effort by communicating more clearly about their own standards, thereby educating those who may be less familiar with traditional postsecondary institutions and policies.

- As oversight agencies consider new types of credentials and providers — especially when determining eligibility for aid — they should consider how well those programs meet quality indicators for more traditional programs. Although flexibility on "input" factors and organizational design expectations may be necessary, a strong focus on student outcomes in the program and after completion should be common to all. Governors and other leaders can aid in this effort by signaling how many educational pathways can lead to family-sustaining employment and by committing to investigate fraud and abuse wherever necessary.

Area 3 ○ ○ ○

Build Seamless Pathways

3

Today's postsecondary students have more opportunities for learning, skill development, and growth than ever — but many of these learning systems and providers remain disconnected and misaligned. Some steps to improve quality and coordination in this area could include:

Area 4 ○ ○ ○ ○

Support Faculty Development and Collaboration

4

Equitable access to quality credentials won't simply happen. It requires significant redesign of programs so that students demonstrate core competencies (analytical reasoning, communication, problem-solving with diverse peers, etc.) and the knowledge and skills that graduates need for work, life, and civic participation. Faculty members must lead such redesigns. Working collaboratively, the nation's scholar teachers can design programs that will ensure effective learning among their diverse students. Several emerging models and sets of resources suggest ways to build faculty leadership and engagement:

- State systems, disciplinary and/or national organizations can generate and review evidence about students' achievement of core competencies and can "tune" their programs to assure that they align with shifting societal and economic needs. System and institutional leaders can support and empower faculty to work together to set shared priorities for equity-minded quality improvement and for students' equitable participation in quality learning experiences.

- Educators at two- and four-year institutions can work together to create more seamless pathways among different programs, including those leading to and from non-degree credentials. Faculty can include students' work-related learning in these pathways.

- State systems, disciplinary and/or national organizations can develop collaborative networks to build faculty capacity to support quality, equity, and increased student success. System-wide programs can tap faculty members who are recognized as effective teachers to lead learning communities and expand effective practices. These learning communities, which should include part-time and full-time faculty, can build the needed leadership for program redesign.

- States and institutions can improve their approaches to program approval and review. This will improve their ability to weed out low-quality courses and programs and will help them identify inequities in achievement within and across programs. As part of this effort, they can change their evaluation processes for courses and faculty so that evaluations show more clearly how a course or instructor contributed to the cumulative and equitable achievement of key competencies.

Area 5 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   **5**

Plan for Institutional Closures and Mergers

Abrupt institutional failures leave students stranded and faculty and staff members jobless. In many recent cases, those responsible for oversight appear to have had information suggesting that closure was possible. Some failed to act promptly. Others may have relied on incomplete or incorrect information.

To lessen the negative impact of future closures, those responsible should develop more proactive, collaborative approaches. Such approaches can protect the interests of students, communities, and taxpayers while bolstering institutional stability. These efforts might include the following:

- Building on the pathways discussion above, states — working with institutions, employers, and others — could build a stronger student record management system that would give students from failed institutions quick access to their transcripts and other records. States must also reassure employers that an institution's closure need not mean that its credentials lack value. Data from other quality indicators about the institution may be useful to help illustrate this point.

- When an institution appears to be financially insecure, one oversight body could be expected to alert others to the issue while preserving appropriate confidentiality. For a public institution, the state might convene relevant accreditor(s), federal agency representatives, and institutional agents. For a private institution — especially one with a footprint in more than one state — the accreditor or federal agency could convene representatives of all involved states. While most oversight bodies require institutions to meet some standard of financial responsibility or sustainability, many experts consider current measures outdated or insufficiently timely. Institutional, state, and federal accrediting bodies could work together to identify gaps in existing measures, consider new or adapted metrics, and identify the appropriate actor(s) to collect and use in decision-making. It may be especially important to consider the loopholes that can open when different funding streams are controlled by different oversight bodies — e.g., federal financial aid, federal GI Bill funds for veterans and their families, and state financial aid. When one body decides to pause or end its funding for a program or institution, it should proactively inform other agencies responsible for other funding streams.

These priority areas and sample illustrations represent steps that various actors might take to improve our quality assurance and improvement systems. Though the list of possibilities can be daunting, systems change can begin with a set of actors choosing one priority area as a starting place for relationship development and activity alignment. It could be a relatively simple effort — supporting just one institution through a tough time, for example, or aligning metrics within a particular priority sector for a state's workforce development. Such initial first steps could build trust, reveal hidden resources, and foster collaboration. Building a quality assurance and improvement system will not happen overnight. We look forward to learning together in the years to come.

Conclusion

This call for collective action includes some compelling examples of institutions and organizations that are pursuing the change that's needed. But they are just examples. The full spectrum of needed responses must emerge as each of the involved sectors assumes its part of the overall responsibility for genuine systemic improvement.

The need for such improvement is urgent. Profound changes in the economy, in society, and in educational systems and institutions require equally profound changes in the way we regulate the sector and assess the quality of college degrees and other credentials earned after high school. This report, which aims to be at least a first step in that change effort, proposes three specific, synchronized steps:

- Commit to pursuing quality and equity, not as discrete goals, but as a dual, linked objective.

- Coordinate the pursuit of institution-based curricular reform with systems and regulatory reforms developed by federal and state policymakers, accreditors, and/or associations.

- Enlist and support the active cooperation of leaders from all of these relevant sectors.

As task force members, we ask that you reflect on, commit to, and take these steps. We also invite your best thinking in helping refine this model to improve quality and ensure equity in education. The students of this nation will be grateful for your efforts, and the nation as a whole will be better.

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