Report on the Higher Education and Workforce Alignment Project

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STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

Alignment Report - Council Objectives

- Review context for the alignment project and process.
- Summarize key findings from stakeholder input.
- Outline core and near term recommendations.
- Obtain recommended changes from Council as part of action to approve the report.

Functions of Higher Education

Higher education serves many important functions, which include (but are not limited to):

- Foundational knowledge – liberal learning.
- Civic engagement cultivation.
- Social development and independence.
- Preparation for the workforce via chosen field of study (alignment).

What Constitutes Alignment?

For the purposes of this project: Helping individuals prepare for meaningful careers while also meeting employer needs.

- Specifically, improving the alignment between workforce needs and higher education academic programs to reduce labor market imbalances.

- An evolving aspect of alignment focuses on deepening efforts related to specific skills and competencies needed across various industry sectors.

Alignment Project Context

Virginia possesses an ecosystem of higher education, workforce development and economic development entities engaged in various alignment efforts. These:

- Often operate independently.
- Focus on specific needs.
- Rely on different data sources and analyses.
- Include pockets of excellence.
- Lack coordination/an overarching framework to build capacity, inform student and policy decisions, academic programs, workforce and economic development.

Alignment Project Process

Stakeholder outreach:
- Eight states: CO, GA, IA, KY, MO, MT, PA, TX
- Primary research by staff on national and international reports and assessments pertaining to alignment.
- Six state level entities and stakeholders engaged in higher education, economic development and workforce development.
- Input from 14 higher education institutions:
  - Four year institutions - 13
  - Community colleges -1
  - Academic affairs, innovation, student success, career services, etc.

Stakeholder Input - Key Findings

Need and support for:

- Improved coordination of alignment initiatives; and
- Consistent, routine source of data (on labor supply, demand and imbalance), analysis and associated data translation.
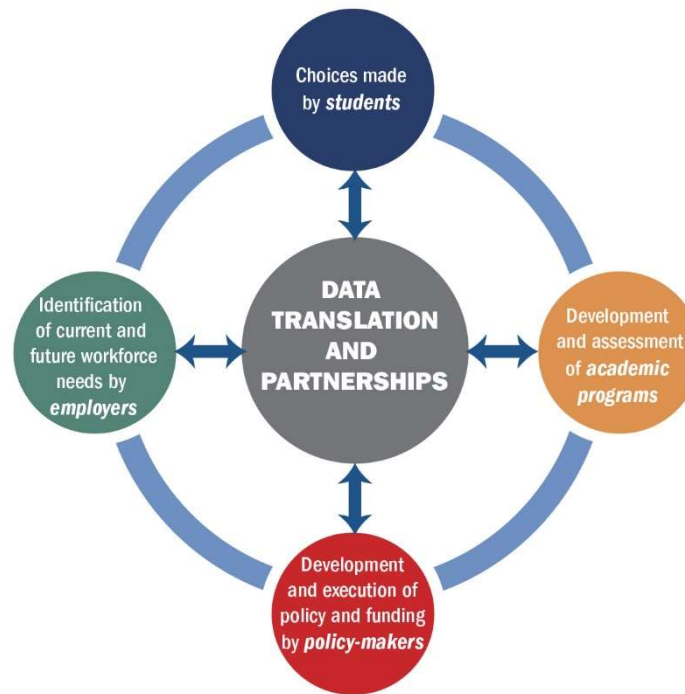
Findings - Improved Coordination

Efforts to improve coordination should consider the following:

- Connect higher education, students, policy-makers, employers and labor market data to effectively address alignment.
- Alignment is a complex issue.
- Leverage and coordinate existing efforts.
- Obtain buy-in from stakeholders.

Framework for Coordination

Higher Education and Workforce Alignment Ecosystem

Core Recommendation

An aligned higher education and workforce ecosystem should include five core components:

1. <u>Data Translation and Partnerships</u>: Establish a clear owner of this function that has the capability, capacity and stability to provide data analysis and translate that insight to other partners.
2. <u>Students</u>: Choose majors or certificate programs that align with a student's interests and capabilities, but also with programs that are aligned with workforce needs.
3. <u>Higher Education Institutions</u>: Develop programs and modify educational instruction to better align with the skills and competency needs of employers.
4. <u>Policy-makers</u>: Access consistent, translated data analysis in order to inform strategic planning, policy development and funding decisions.
5. <u>Employers</u>: Engage employers further to define skills and competency needs.

Near Term Recommendations

1. Cultivate a framework for coordinated workforce data analysis, translation and partnerships.
2. Use labor data and methodology to perform labor market imbalance analyses.
3. Identify top competencies needed in the workforce and how these are cultivated by Virginia's higher education institutions.

Near Term Recommendations cont.

4. Update SCHEV's program productivity review process to reflect institutional as well as student-as-consumer measures.
5. Identify and support connections between career exploration and guidance in K-12 with what occurs in post-secondary higher education.
6. Inventory and assess existing alignment efforts within Virginia, identify successful programs and policies in other states and countries.

Next Steps

- Council action to approve the draft alignment report, including any recommended changes.
- Transmit to stakeholders including the Governor's Chief Workforce Advisor.
- Work-plan development and partner engagement to implement recommendations.