



ILLINOIS EDUCATION AND CAREER
SUCCESS NETWORK

Building Pathways to Career, Connection, and Choice

*April 28, 2025,
10 a.m.–11 a.m.*



Mission

To support communities to increase meaningful and equitable postsecondary attainment

Supports

- Share best practices & foster peer-to-peer learning
- Provide technical assistance
- Serve as a conduit for innovation grants
- Gather and curate critical data



Building Pathways to Career, Connection, and Choice

Charlotte Cahill and Kyle Hartung, Associate Vice Presidents, Education, Jobs for the Future

Illinois Education and Career Success Network Webinar | Monday, April 28, 2025

JFF's vision & north star

By 2033,
75 million Americans
facing barriers to economic
advancement will have
quality jobs.



PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

Imagine a system that meets future talent needs and guides young people toward meaningful careers. Let's make that happen.

Time to face facts: We need to reimagine our education and workforce systems to meet the needs of states, regions, employers, and individuals. Together, we can ensure that every young person can build a better life and contribute to their community.



Pathways to Prosperity framework

State and regional leaders design pathways to help young people advance from high school, through postsecondary education, and into meaningful careers.

To successfully create pathways, our framework outlines **five key levers**:



Secondary-
Postsecondary
Integration



Career
Navigation Systems



Work-Based
Learning



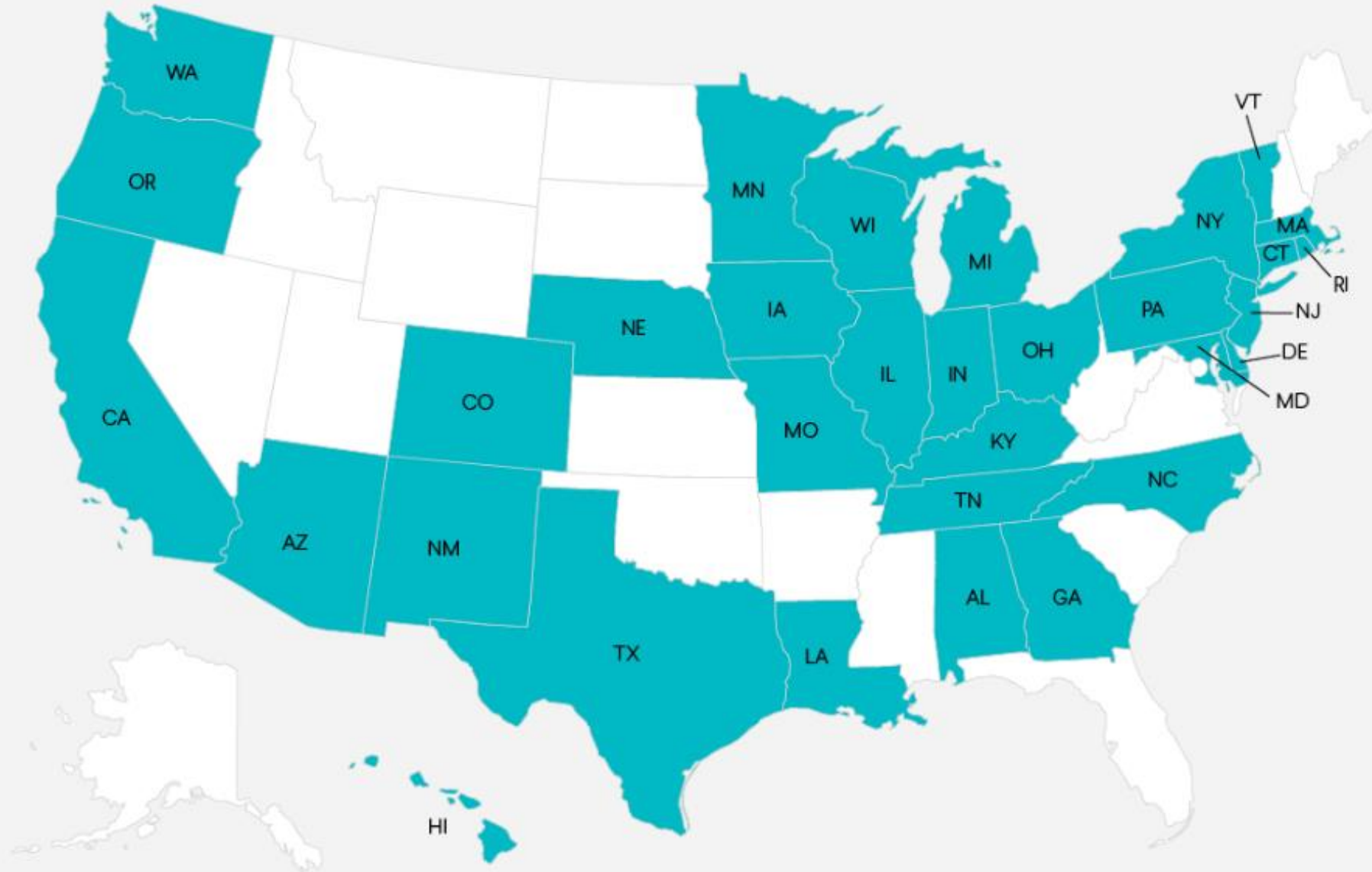
Intermediaries



Leadership and Policy

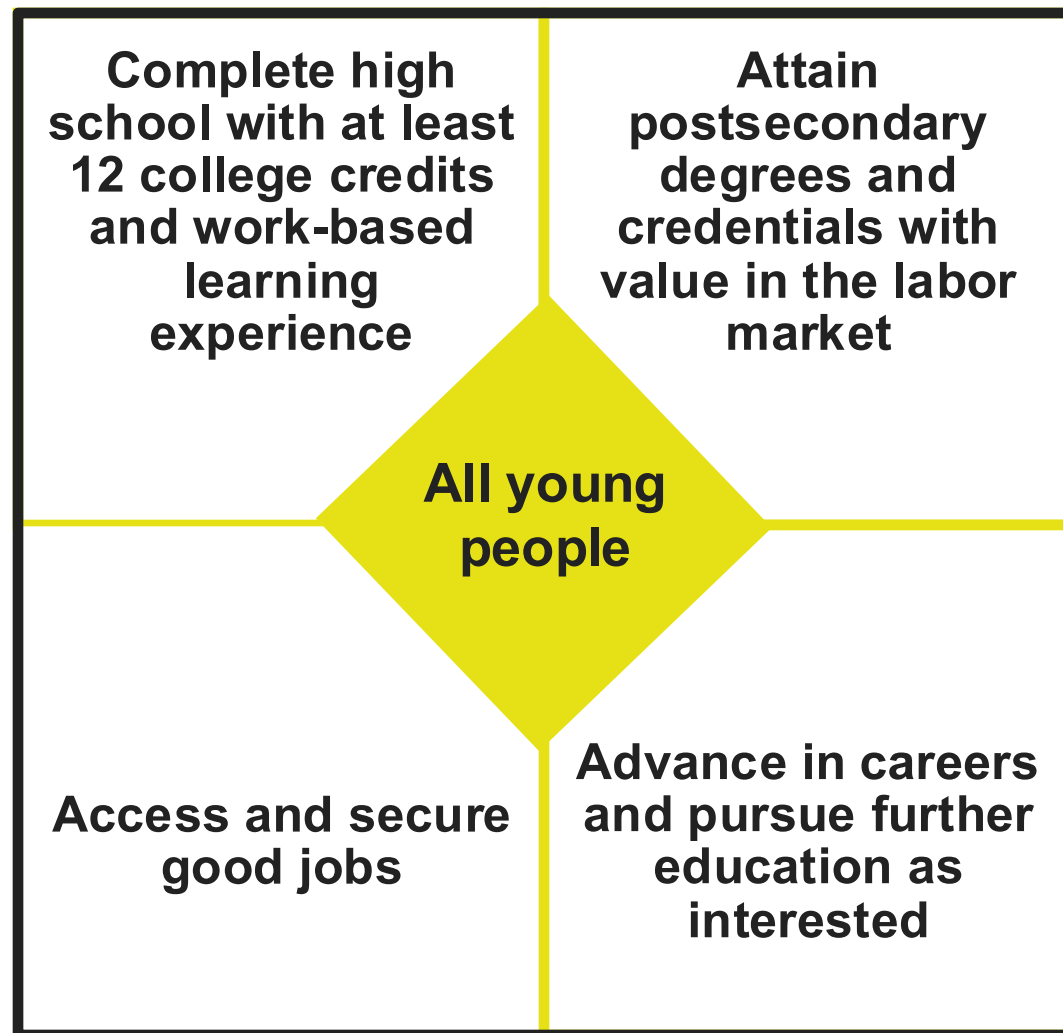
Pathways to Prosperity Coalition

Championing a shared vision, together.

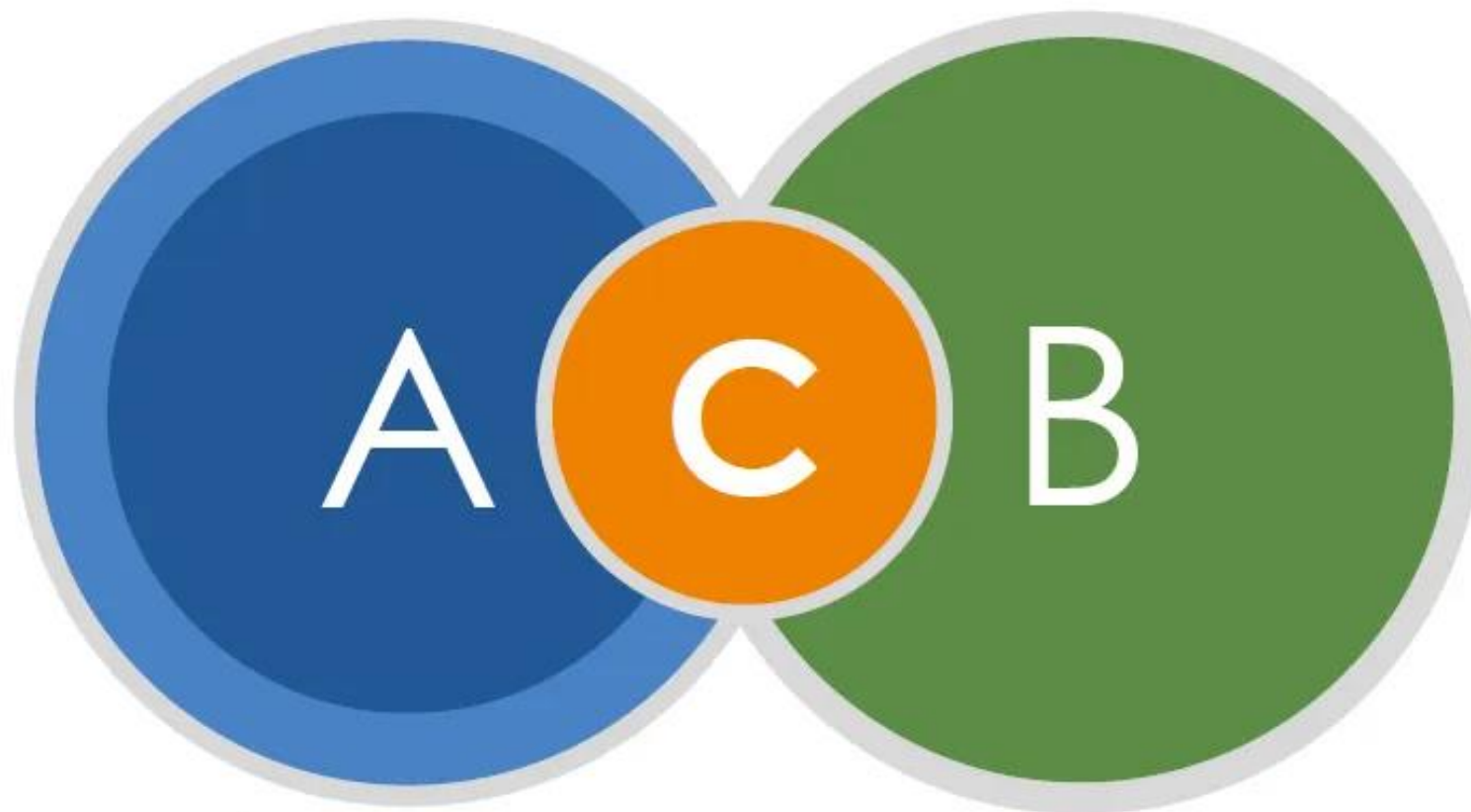


**It's time to
rethink the
outcomes
we seek**

**We've been
using this
frame since
2012**



Dual Transformation



TRANSFORMATION A
Strengthen Today

C APABILITIES LINK
Flip the Dilemma

TRANSFORMATION B
Create Tomorrow

Are we focused on the right things?

Wealth-building and economic security

Social capital

Choice-filled lives

Burdens shifted from individuals to systems



What's in our way?

Systems are not designed to do these things well

Our strategies are not designed to advance them

The adults in the room don't have the right mindset

We don't have the right voices engaged



What do we think should be true?



Adolescents and young adults deserve choice-filled lives

- Young people can pursue multiple routes to meaningful careers and have access to the information needed on the benefits of their choices, including but not limited to monetary gains
- Young people do not have to navigate false choices between exploration and commitment



Systems are designed with no dead ends or wrong doors

- Young people should receive messages that journeys to a thriving adulthood are not only linear
- The benefits and barriers of different paths or choices made throughout a career journey are transparent
- Adolescents and young adults are provided with spaces to explore different perspectives and their own identities without an overwhelming pressure to make trajectory-setting commitments



Young people have access to the web of positive relationships that are required for them to build identities and contribute to their world

- Transitions and points of decision-making can be well-supported by positive relationships
- Sustained relationships serve as connective tissue along the career journey
- Positive relationships can help mitigate structural or systemic barriers adolescents and young adults face
- Young people can access resources and support outside of family to navigate an unfamiliar path

**Three things
we're thinking
differently
about**



Pathways to Prosperity 2025 Priorities

Job quality

Credential quality

Connections

Job quality

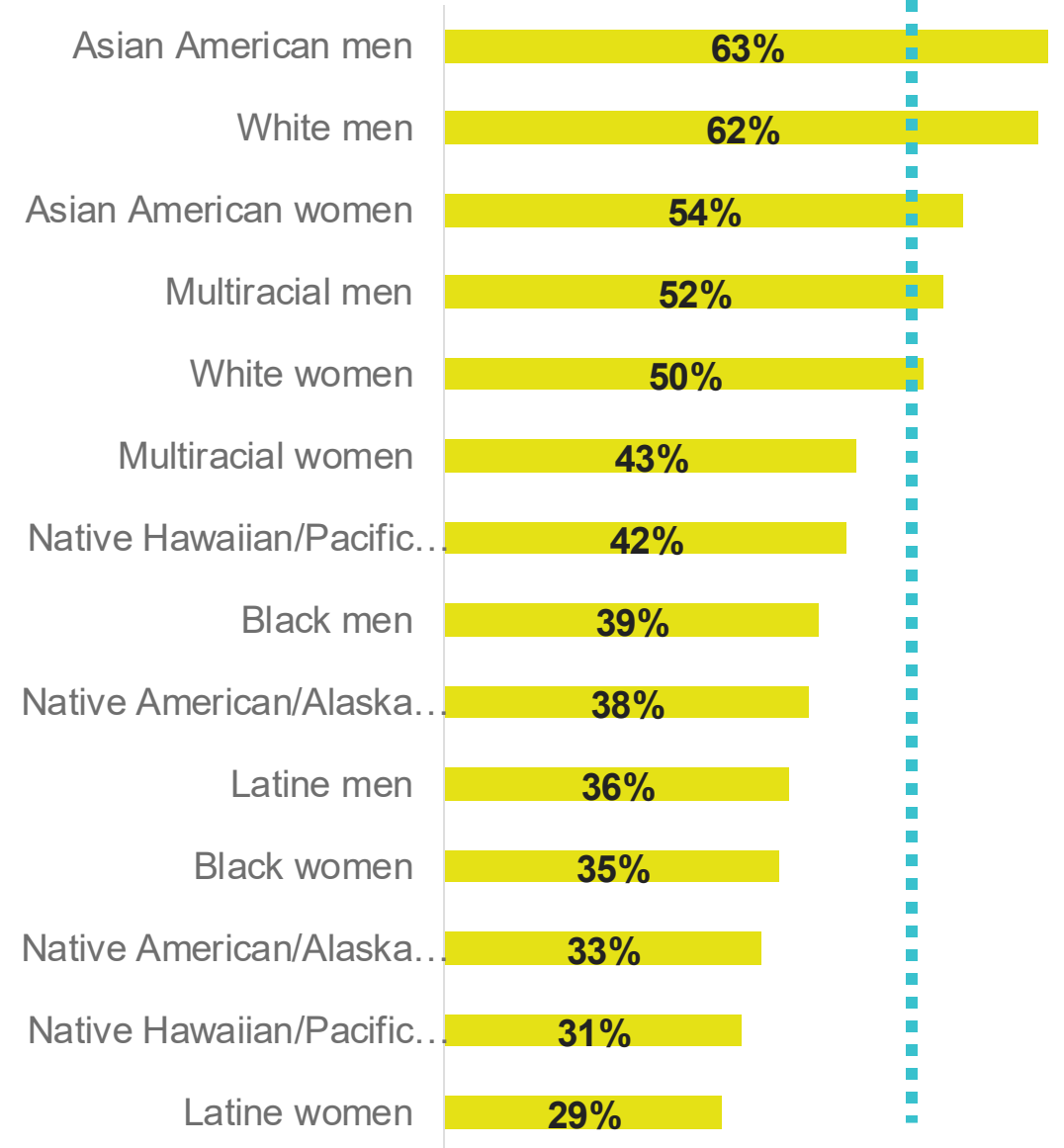
Pathways should lead to careers that offer not just a paycheck, but long-term growth, stability, and dignity.

Fewer than half of young workers have jobs that pay over \$35,000 per year

Young women earn less than young men

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, *The Uncertain Pathway from Youth to a Good Job*

49% of all young workers have good jobs





**And pay
isn't the
only thing
that matters**



Understanding Job Quality in STEM Sectors



Technology



Health Care



Manufacturing



Learn more

Compensation

Technology



Above average

Health Care



On par

Manufacturing



Area of growth

Advancement

Technology



Above average

Health Care



On par

Manufacturing



On par

Agency & Culture

Technology



On par

Health Care



On par

Manufacturing



On par

Structure

Technology



Above average

Health Care



On par

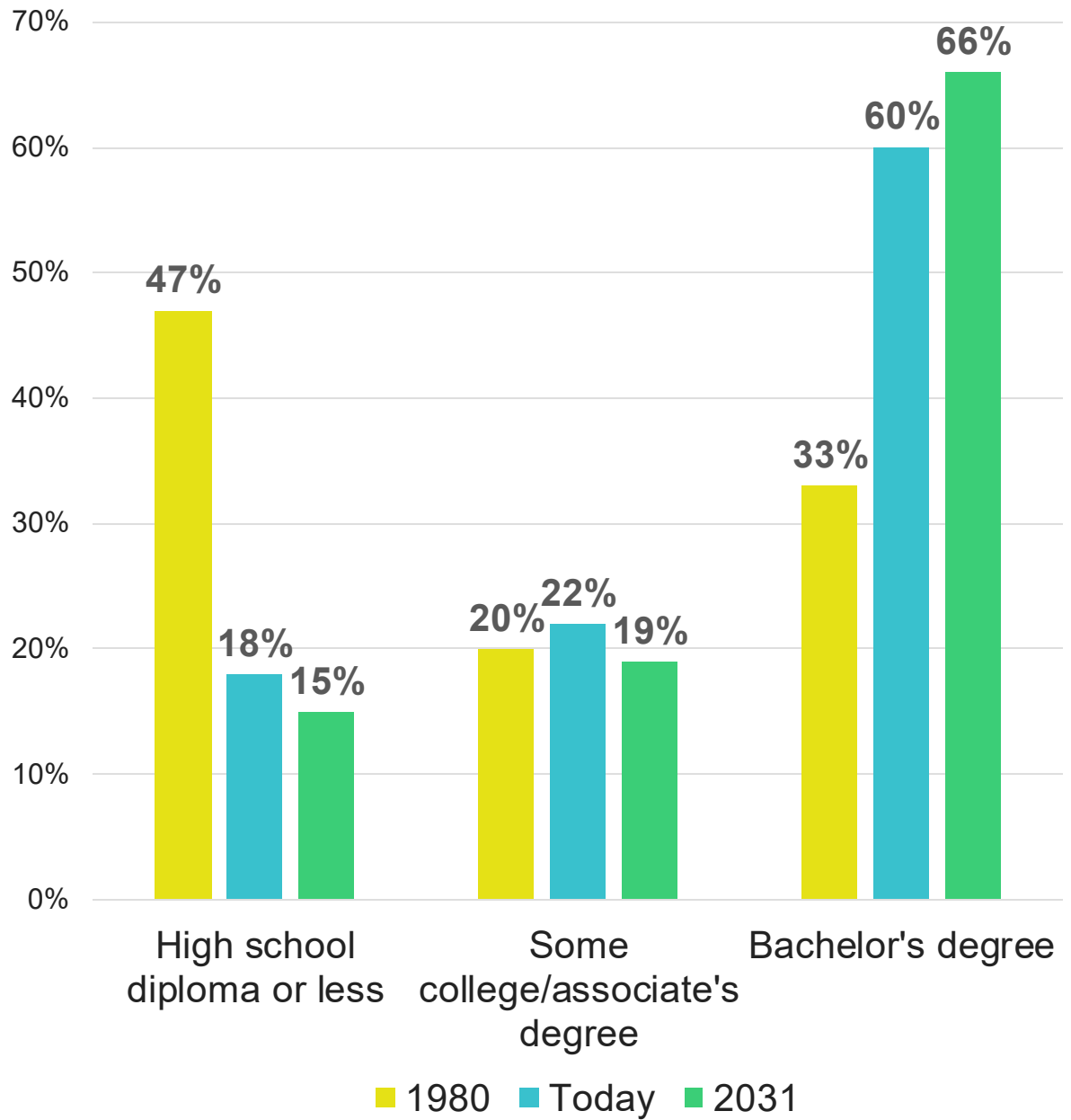
Manufacturing



On par

The educational attainment distribution of workers in good jobs is changing

Source: Zack Mabel, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, "What Works: Education, Training, and Work-Based Pathway Changes that Lead to Good Jobs" presentation at Pathways to Prosperity National Institute, October 23, 2023

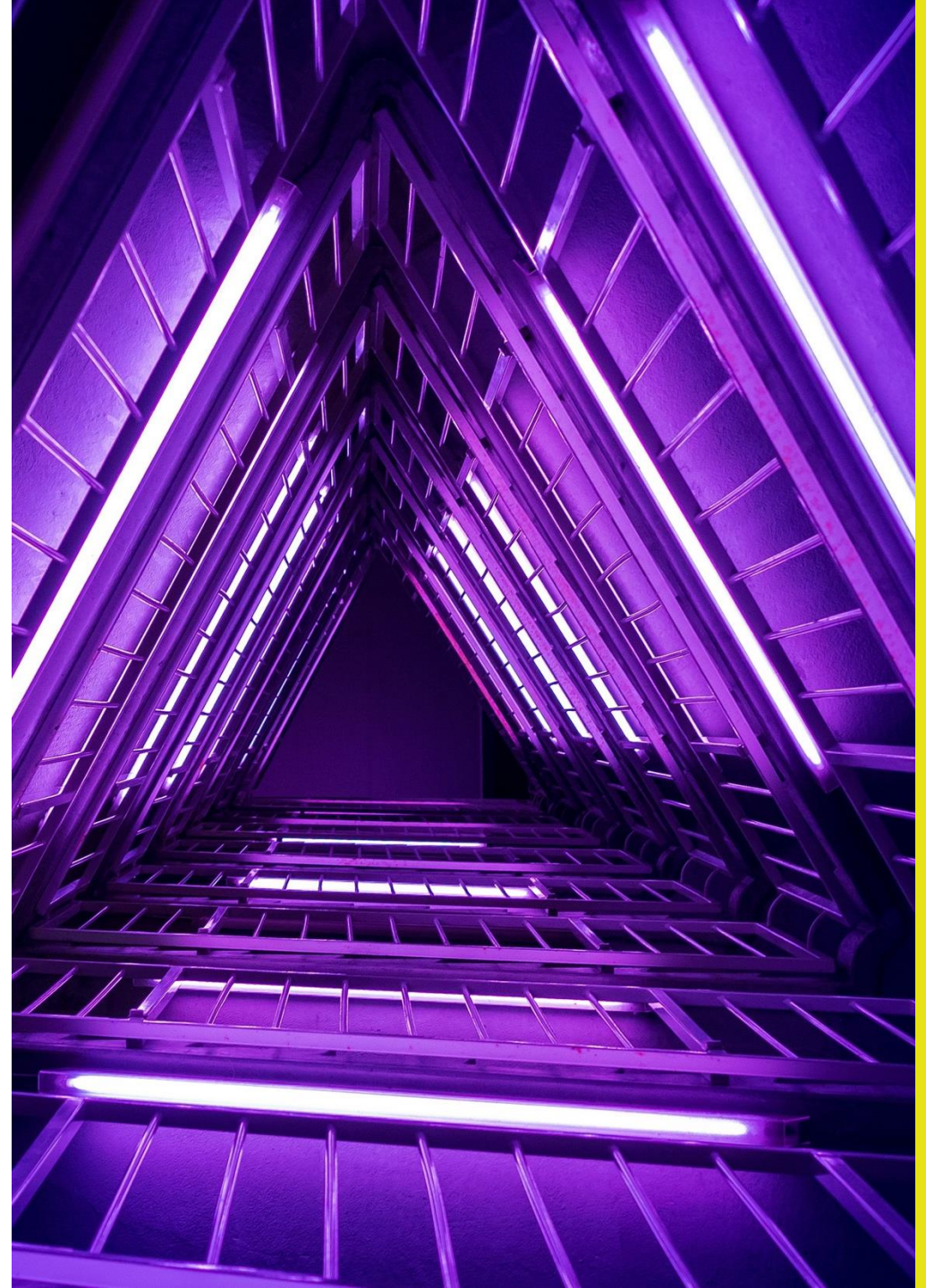


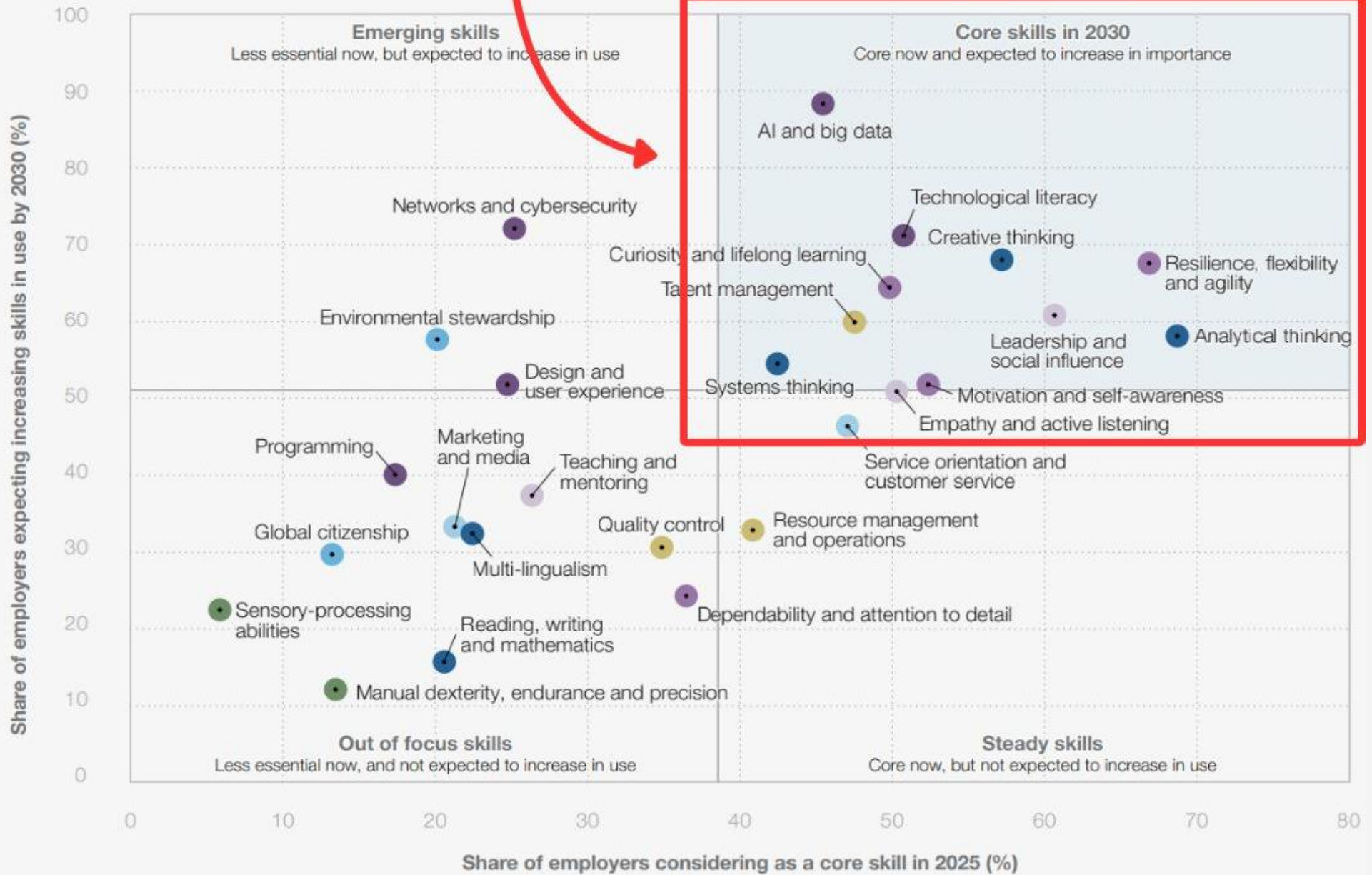
By 2031...

75% of workers with bachelor's degrees will have good jobs

40% of workers with sub-baccalaureate credentials will have good jobs

20% of workers with only a high school diploma will have good jobs





- Cognitive skills
- Engagement skills
- Ethics
- Management skills
- Physical abilities
- Self-efficacy
- Technology skills
- Working with others

Source: Future of Jobs Report 2025

Credential quality

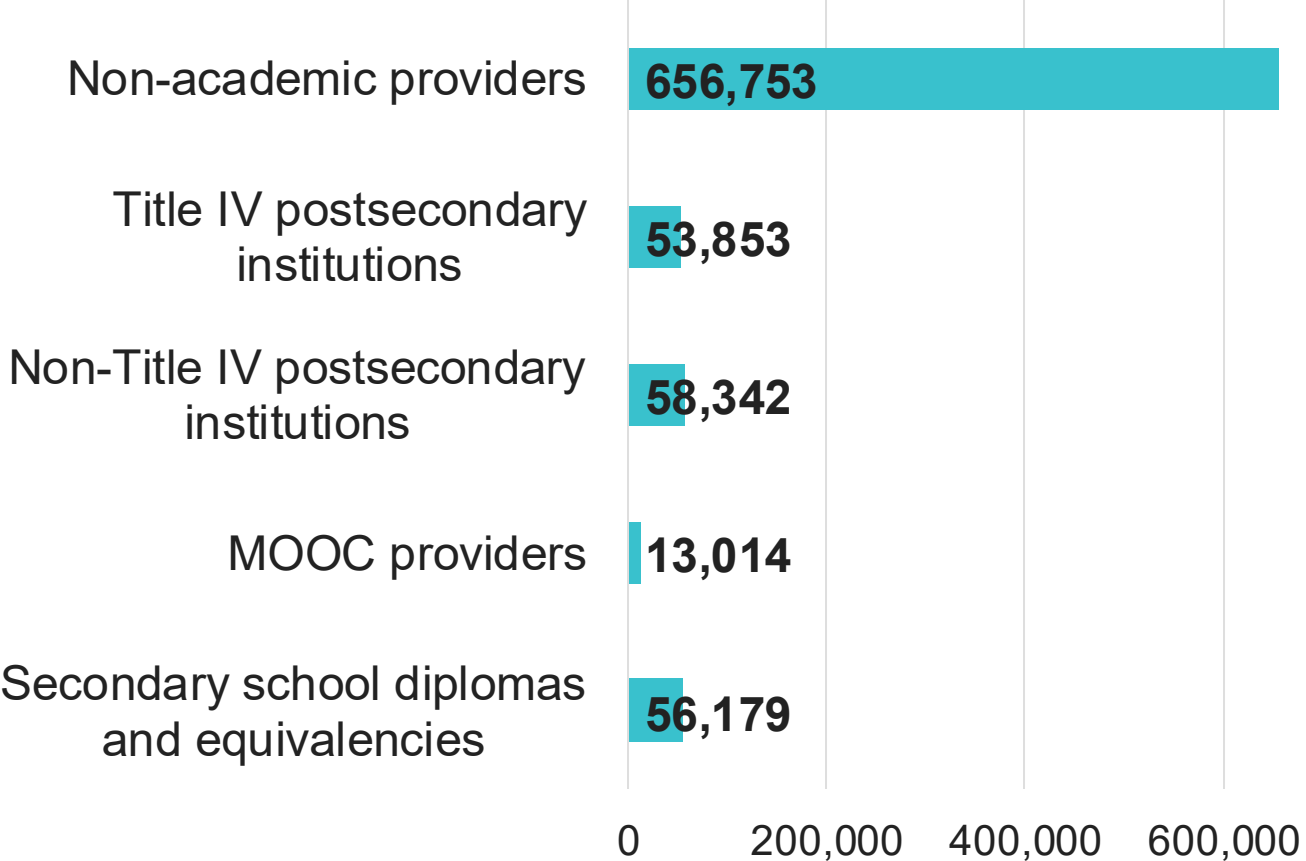
With over a million credentials out there, we need to ensure young people are earning the ones that matter.



There are a lot of credentials out there

In the U.S., almost 60,000 providers offer over one million credentials

Number of nondegree credentials by provider type

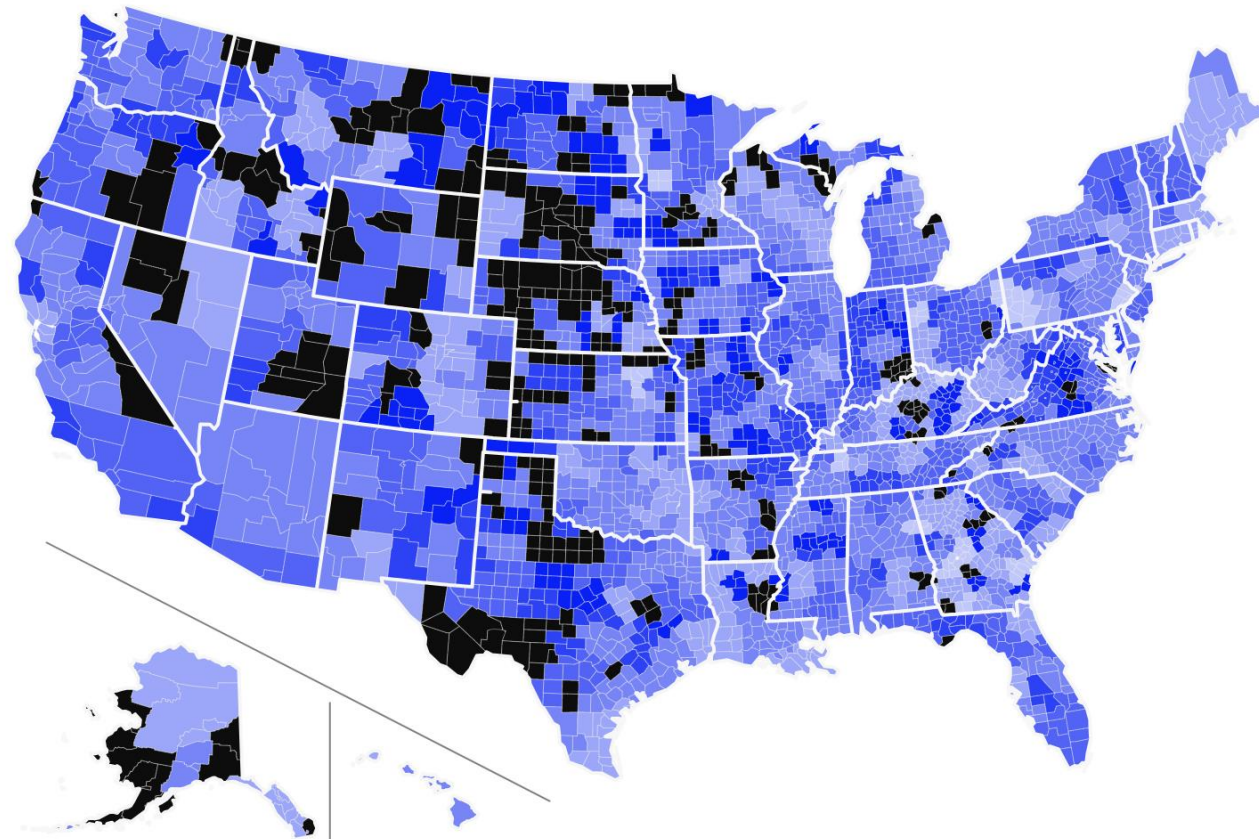


Source: [Credential Engine](#)

But learners aren't earning the credentials employers seek

In over half of U.S. labor markets, at least 50 percent of all middle-skills credentials would need to be granted in different fields of study to meet projected demand through 2031.

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, *The Great Misalignment*

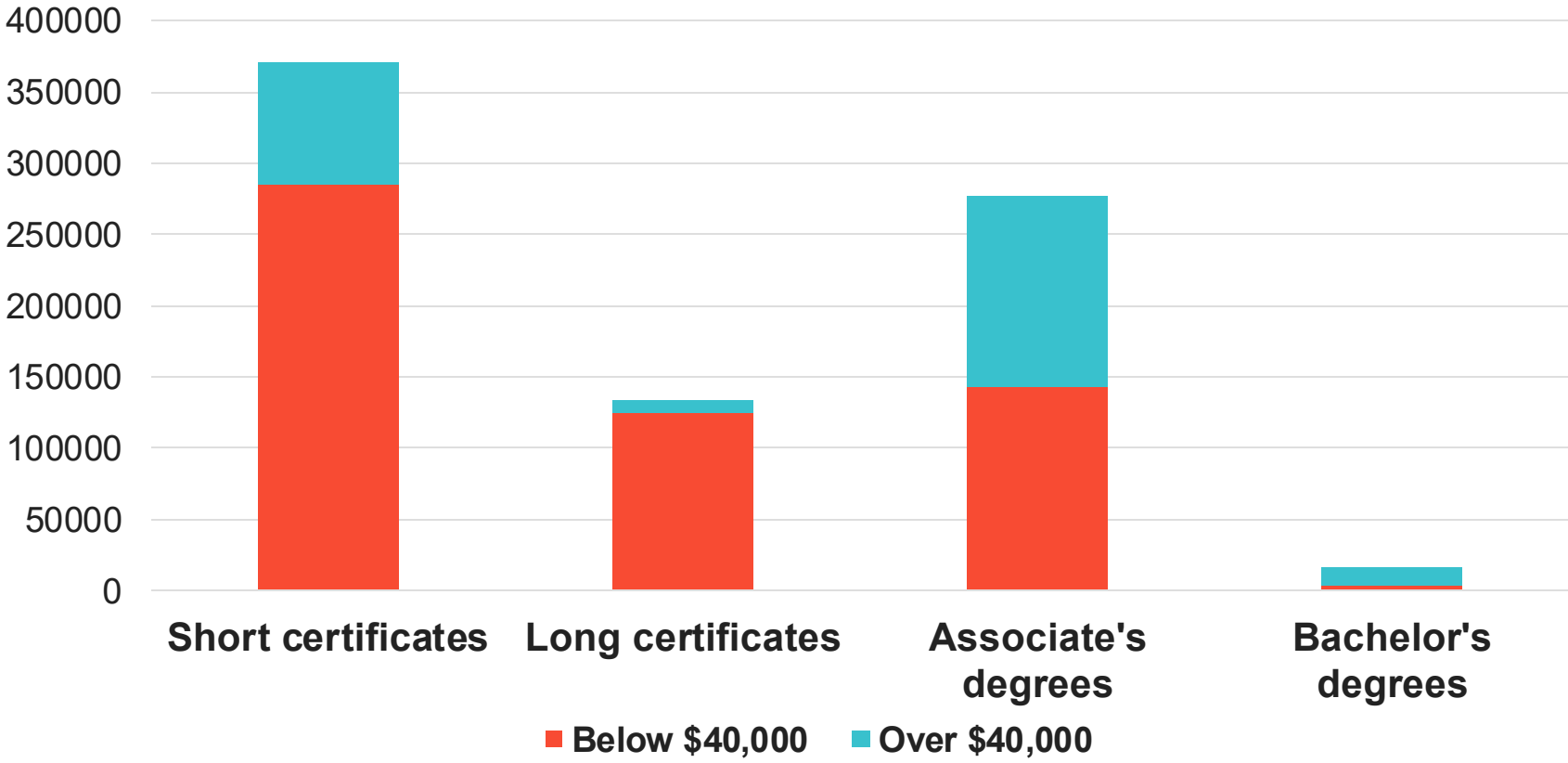


Extent of credentials-to-jobs misalignment

● No data ● Less than 30% ● 30%–<40% ● 40%–<50% ● 50%–<60% ● 60%–<70% ● More than 70%

Earning a workforce credential is not a sure route to a living wage

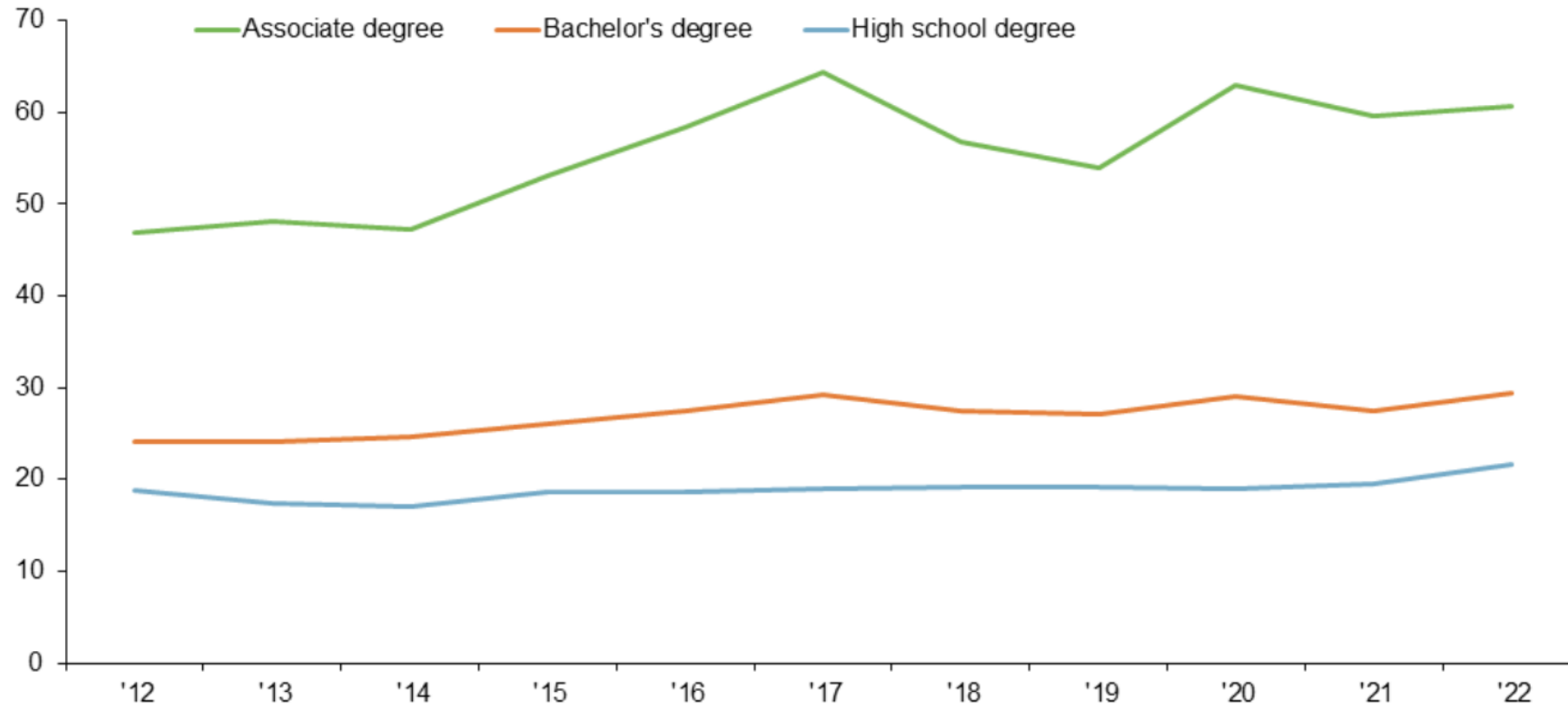
Community college workforce awards by type of award and earnings two years after completion, 2022-2023



Source: [Community College Research Center](#)

Employers seek credentials in combination with degrees

Percentage of Jobs Requiring Certain Degrees and Certifications



What else do we know?

Of the postsecondary degrees and credentials earned by Black and Latine students, **one in five** is a certificate, as compared to **one in seven** of those earned by white students.

Labor market outcomes

Returns to certificate programs are mixed and do not last

Workers see significant variation in the value of certificates across occupations

The labor market value of certificate programs is uneven across students

Stackable credentials

Certificates are rarely stacked in practice

Approximately 2 to 4 percent of the workforce has them

Majority are held by degree-holders who earn a certificate after receiving an associate's or bachelor's degree

Quality matters

Alignment with labor-market demand, including employment projections, in-demand skills, and occupations that offer family-sustaining wages

Industry recognition and portability to ensure credentials are recognized across multiple employers and enable career mobility and flexibility

Connections to employers via mentoring and paid work-based learning opportunities

Credential stackability that ensures the credential builds toward further education and career advancement

Competency mastery and transparency to support the development of clear, demonstrable competencies that align with employer needs, including the specific skills learned through the credential and the broader competencies required for successful employment in the field

Equity and accessibility, including using disaggregated data to measure and promote equitable progress, improving access by improving affordability ensuring access through financial aid; and offering holistic wraparound and supportive services to remove barriers to completion

A focus only on credentials and careers misses the big picture

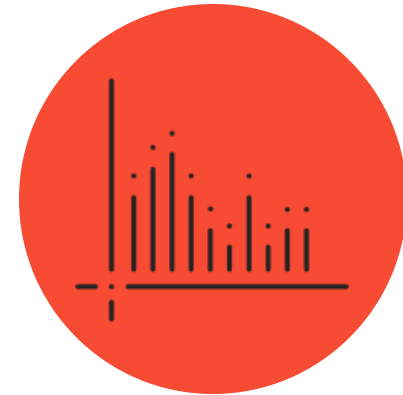
What young people need to thrive



Choice-filled lives



Positive peer and adult relationships



Explicitly developed navigation and decision-making skills

Connections

Young people need more than a job. They need relationships, networks, and real access to opportunity.



Young people are thinking differently about their futures



Young people see themselves as their own best change agents



Young people aspire to live a good life



Young people try on their futures



Young people see opportunity in conversation



Young people are empowered by connections



Young people experience work as surviving, striving, and thriving



Young people envision pathways to thriving

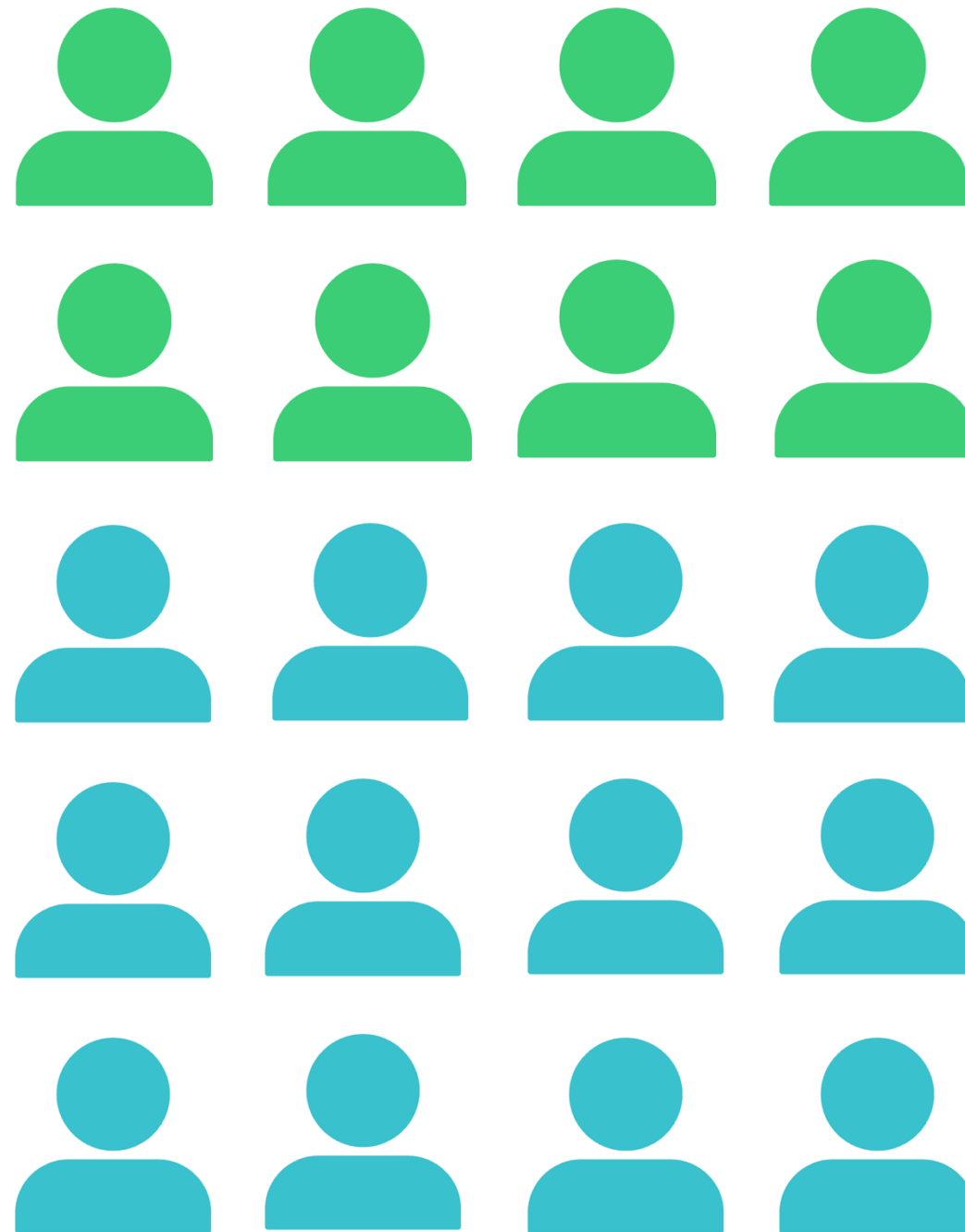


Young people experience identity as an asset

20% of young people report that they have no developmental relationships in their lives at all.

Another 20% report having only one.

Source: [Search Institute](#)



Key types of connections

- 1) **Economy:** part-/full-time employment; participation in paid work-based learning; consumption; production (work); investments; contributions (taxes)
- 2) **Education & training systems & institutions:** enrollment in or graduation from educational institutions or training programs; work-study; fellowships; programs providing wraparound supports; tools for lifelong learning
- 3) **Community:** national service; volunteering; community service projects; participation or membership in community and faith-based institutions
- 4) **Individuals:** relationships with other people and memberships in human networks

NEW
IDEAS
FOR
OTHER
TIMES[®]

Critical concepts in adolescent development

Exploration and risk-taking

Meaning and purpose through contribution

Decision making and emotional regulation

Support from parents and other caring adults

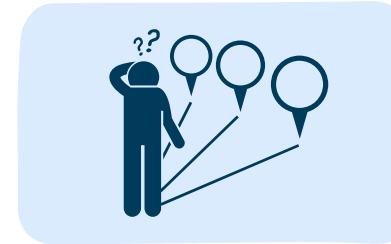
Developing values, goals, and identity

Respect and social status

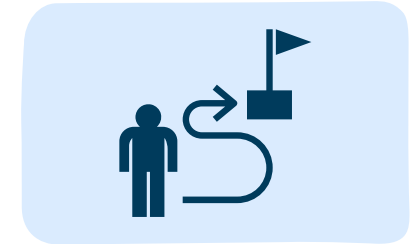
KEY DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF ADOLESCENCE



Safe and satisfying ways to explore the world and take healthy risks to test out new ideas and experiences



Real-world scenarios in which to build decision-making and emotional regulation skills



Avenues to develop a sense of meaning and purpose by contributing to peers, families, and communities



Positive ways to earn respect and social status among peers and adults



Experiences that help define personal values, goals, and a positive sense of identity

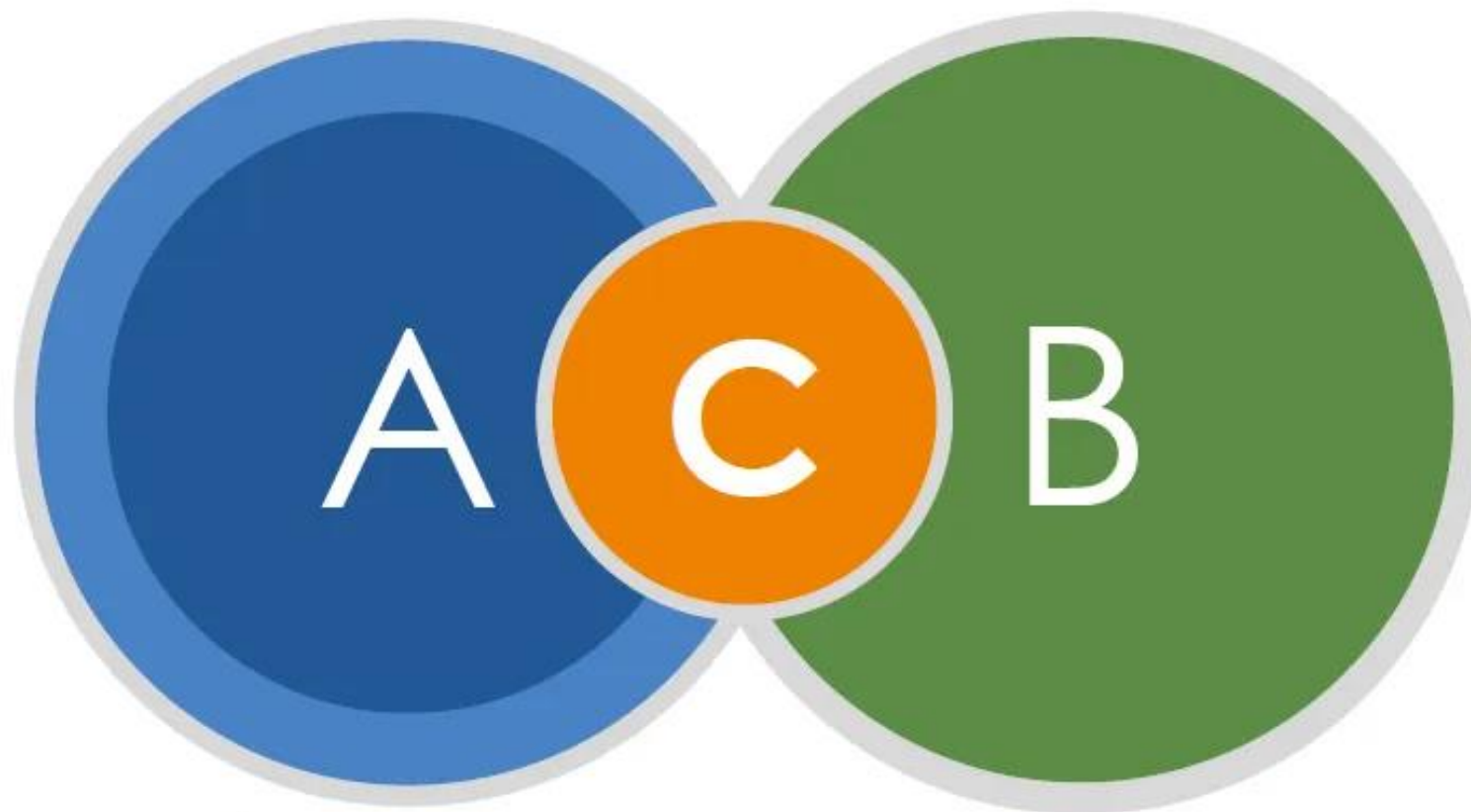


Warmth and support from parents and other caring adults

Read more about the Core Science of Adolescence by visiting: developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/core-science-of-adolescence

**What would
pathways look
like if designed
with these ideas
in mind?**

Dual Transformation



TRANSFORMATION A
Strengthen Today

C APABILITIES LINK
Flip the Dilemma

TRANSFORMATION B
Create Tomorrow

Persistent binaries

Academic vs. workforce

Skills vs. credentials

Degree vs. nondegree

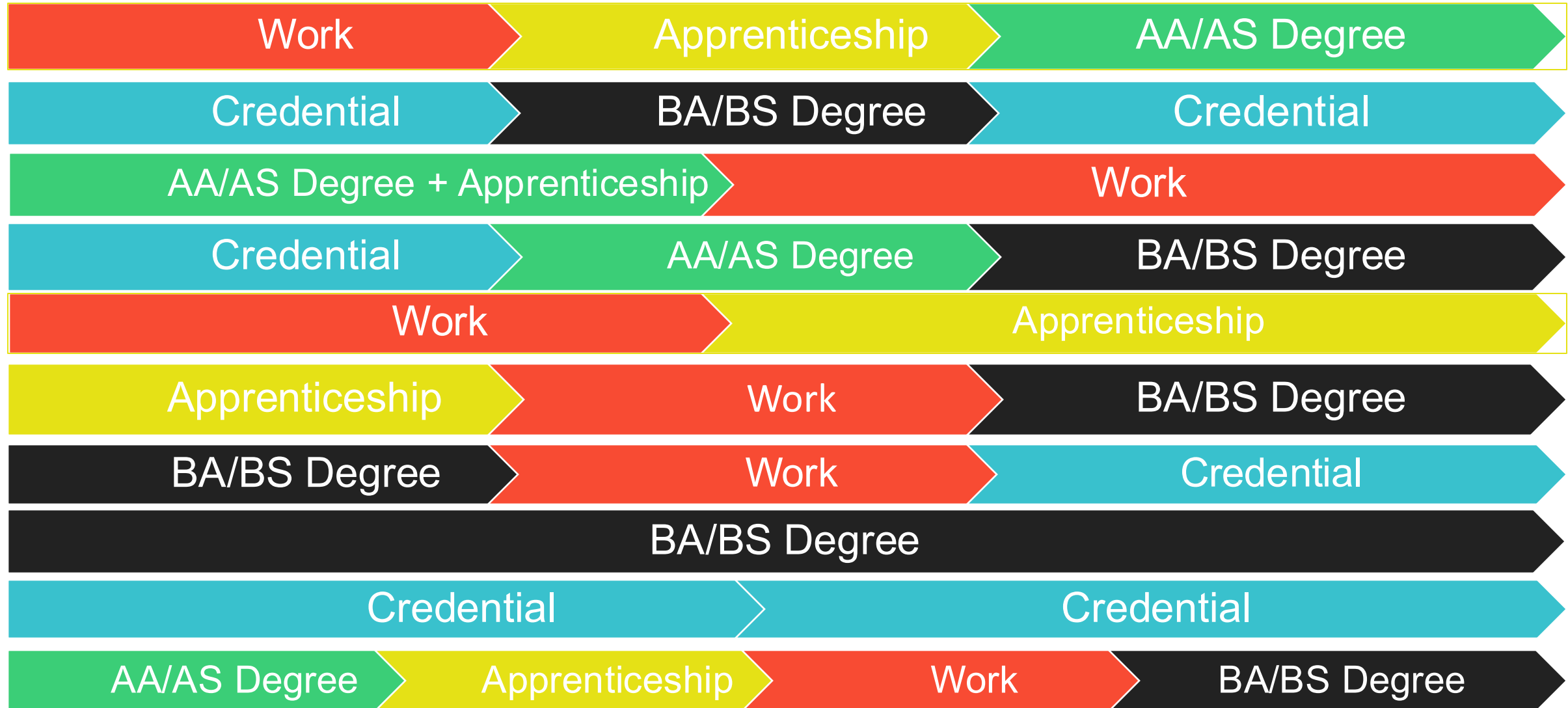
Learning vs. earning

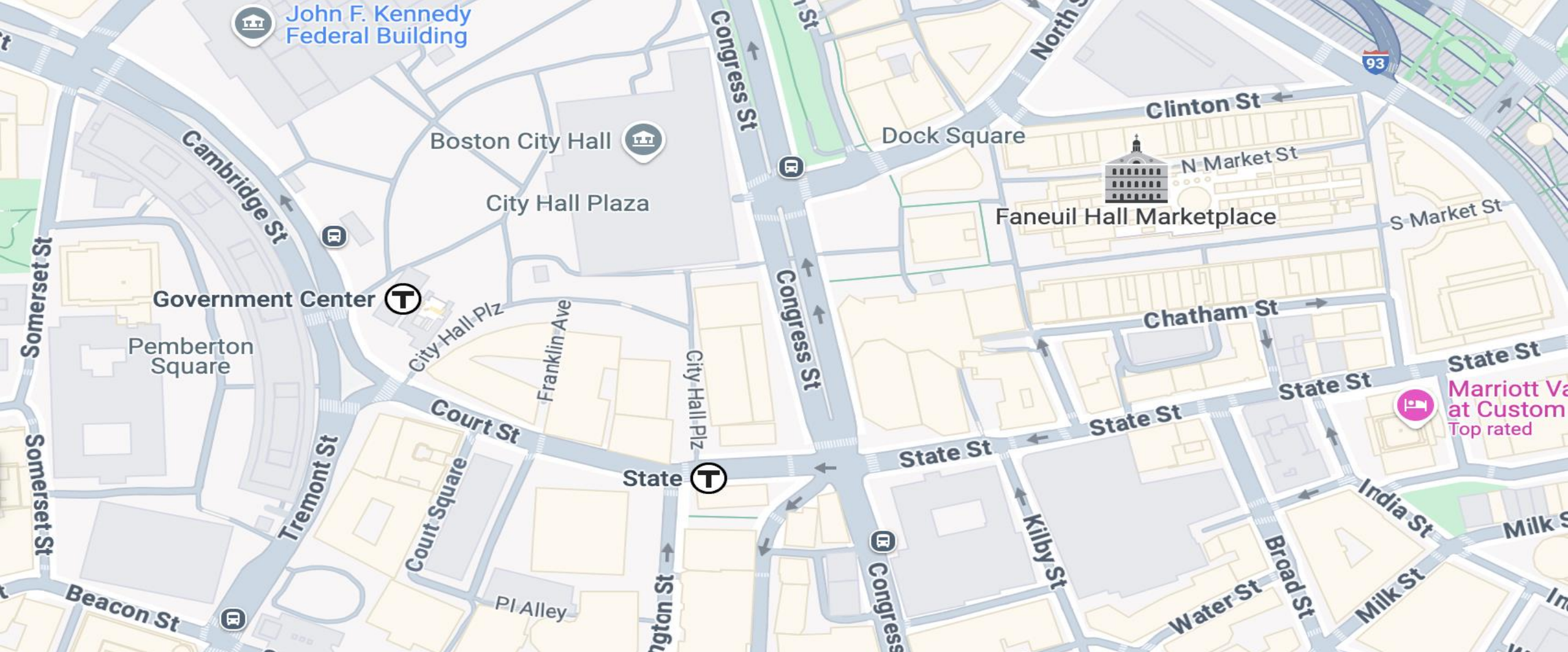
Meaning vs. money



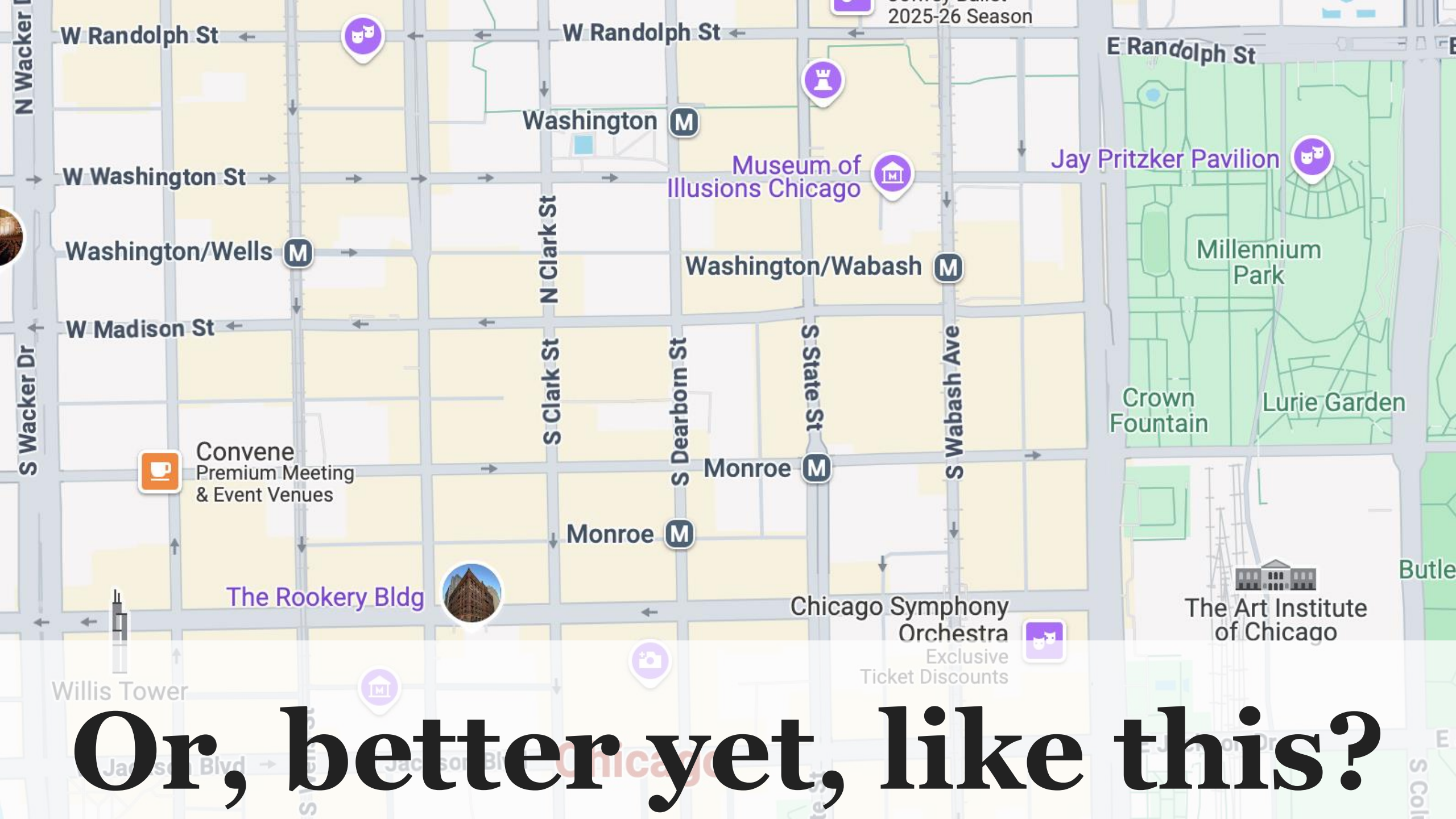
We're not playing a zero-sum game

A few of many paths in a no-dead-ends system





What if pathways looked more like this?



2025-26 Season

W Randolph St

W Randolph St

E Randolph St

W Washington St

Washington M

Museum of Illusions Chicago

Jay Pritzker Pavilion

Washington/Wells M

Washington/Wabash M

Millennium Park

W Madison St

N Clark St

S Dearborn St

S State St

S Wabash Ave

Crown Fountain

Lurie Garden

Convene Premium Meeting & Event Venues

Monroe M

Monroe M

The Rookery Bldg

Chicago Symphony Orchestra Exclusive Ticket Discounts

The Art Institute of Chicago

Willis Tower

Or, better yet, like this?

A colorful board game grid with numbers 1 to 90. The board features several yellow ladders and red snakes. The ladders connect lower numbers to higher numbers: 1 to 31, 4 to 14, 9 to 17, 28 to 34, 36 to 44, 49 to 54, 64 to 74, 79 to 84, and 89 to 90. The snakes connect higher numbers to lower numbers: 10 to 4, 13 to 9, 17 to 9, 24 to 10, 27 to 24, 34 to 33, 37 to 34, 48 to 47, 51 to 47, 54 to 49, 67 to 64, 73 to 72, 76 to 74, 80 to 79, and 83 to 73. The board is populated with various cartoon illustrations of children and animals. A semi-transparent white banner with the text "All ladders, no chutes" is overlaid across the middle of the board.

All ladders, no chutes

Thank you!

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Learn more, access additional resources, and stay connected to a national conversation:



**JFF's Pathways
to Prosperity
Network**



**The Pathways to
Prosperity
Coalition**

