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Delaware Pathways Outcomes Study Final Report — Summary Slides

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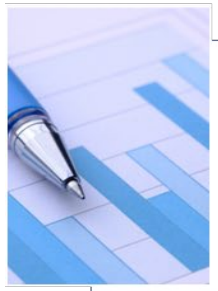
The Delaware Pathways Outcomes Study

is a longitudinal study of high school graduates who completed career pathways in selected public high schools (vo-tech and comprehensive). The study surveyed 2022 pathway graduates 6, 18, and 24 months after graduation, 2023 graduates 6 and 18 months after graduation, and 2024 graduates at 6 months after graduation. More information about the study and the study methodology are included in the Delaware Pathways Outcomes Study Final Report.

The study design addressed the following goals:



Program Improvement: Understanding the connection between pathway courses, work-based learning, and employment and education outcomes can provide evidence on how to promote student success during high school and beyond.

Funding requirements: Multiple foundations and other funding sources have contributed to the development of Delaware pathways. This study incorporates reporting requirements from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Legislative requirement: An annual study of high school student outcomes is required by the Delaware Code Title 14, Chapter 1, Subchapter III, Section 156

Career Pathways are 3- to 4-year programs that provide instruction in academic, technical, and employability skills in fields such as education and training, advanced manufacturing, and information technology.

- ✓ **offered in most Delaware public high schools**
  Pathway terminology varies by district or school; in some locations, pathways are known as programs of study or majors.
- ✓ **a sequence of courses aligned to an occupational field**
  Pathway programs may be developed locally or follow a statewide Delaware Pathway Program model.
- ✓ **an opportunity for earning college credits and credentials**
  In some pathway programs, students take pathway-aligned college courses and earn industry-recognized credentials.
- ✓ **work-based learning**
  Pathways connect students with employers through workplace visits, job shadows, and other work-based learning experiences. This report focuses on immersive experiences, such as internships or co-ops, that range from a few hours per week to full time, typically over weeks or months.

For more information, visit: https://delawarepathways.org/pathways-programs/

Findings summary

The findings suggest that career pathways, and especially when paired with immersive work-based learning, play a meaningful role in shaping students' post–high school education and employment trajectories. Strengthening pathway coherence, expanding high-quality work-based learning, and deepening employer partnerships has the potential improve both college-going and early career economic mobility, especially for students who enter the workforce soon after high school.

- **About half of pathway graduates completed an immersive WBL experience in high school**, with higher participation among students in vo-tech schools than in comprehensive high schools. This variation suggests differences in access and institutional capacity that shape students' exposure to career-connected learning.
- **Postsecondary enrollment rates among pathway graduates are high and persist over time.** Roughly three quarters of graduates enrolled in further education within six months, with participation increasing slightly by 18 months after high school.
- **Engagement in WBL is associated with positive post–high school outcomes.** Students who participated in WBL were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education within six months of graduation and had higher rates of pathway-aligned employment by 18 months after high school. These patterns indicate that WBL complements coursework by strengthening early labor market connections, particularly for students who enter employment soon after graduation.

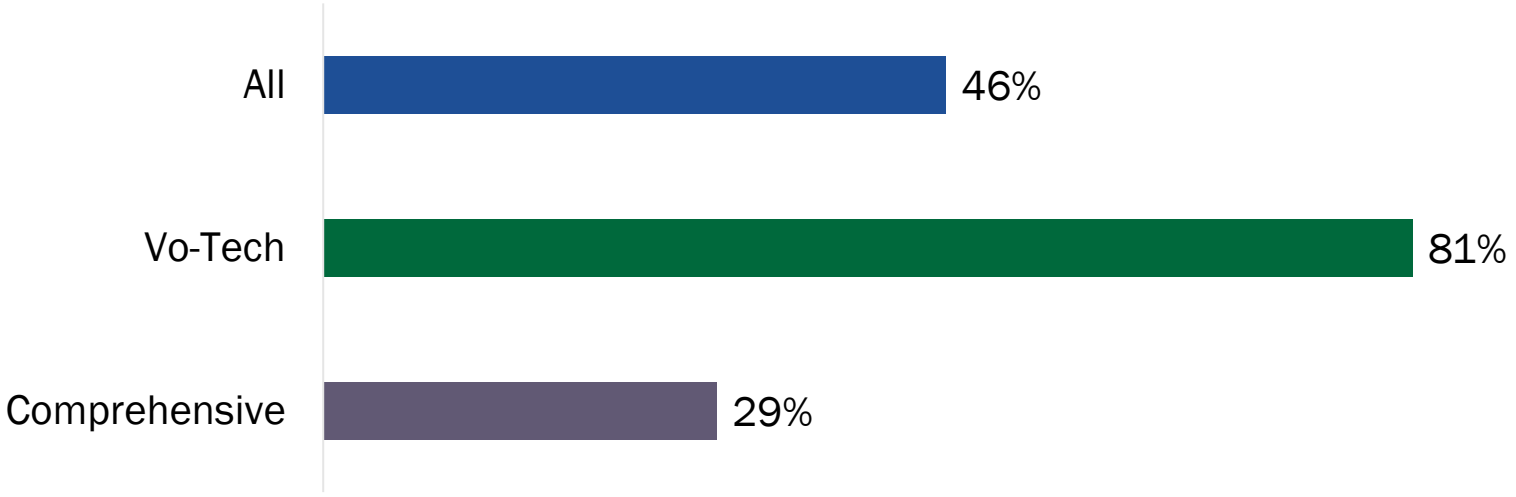
Findings summary, continued

- **Graduates early labor market experiences are typically part time and concentrated in service industries such as retail and hospitality.** Pathway-aligned employment is more common among full-time workers not enrolled in postsecondary education, indicating different transition patterns across graduate groups.
- **Pathway-aligned employment is associated with higher wages.** Graduates working full time in jobs aligned with their high school pathway earn higher wages than peers in non-aligned roles. These findings underscore the economic value of improving alignment between secondary pathways and employment outcomes, particularly for students who delay or forgo postsecondary education.
- **Career pathways and WBL support both individual mobility and state workforce goals.** Strong in-state retention rates of about 90 percent suggest that pathway investments help keep talent local and meet regional labor market needs. At the same time, gaps between educational and employment alignment point to the need for stronger school–employer partnerships and expanded access to high-quality, sustained WBL opportunities.

Immersive work-based learning (WBL) participation

Although national data on students' participation in immersive WBL are not available, Delaware's participation rates exceed those reported in recent surveys of immersive WBL in New York City, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC.

About 46% of pathway graduates in 2022, 2023, and 2024 reported completing an immersive WBL experience in high school, such as an internship or co-op. Participation rates were higher among vo-tech than comprehensive school pathway graduates ($p<.01$).

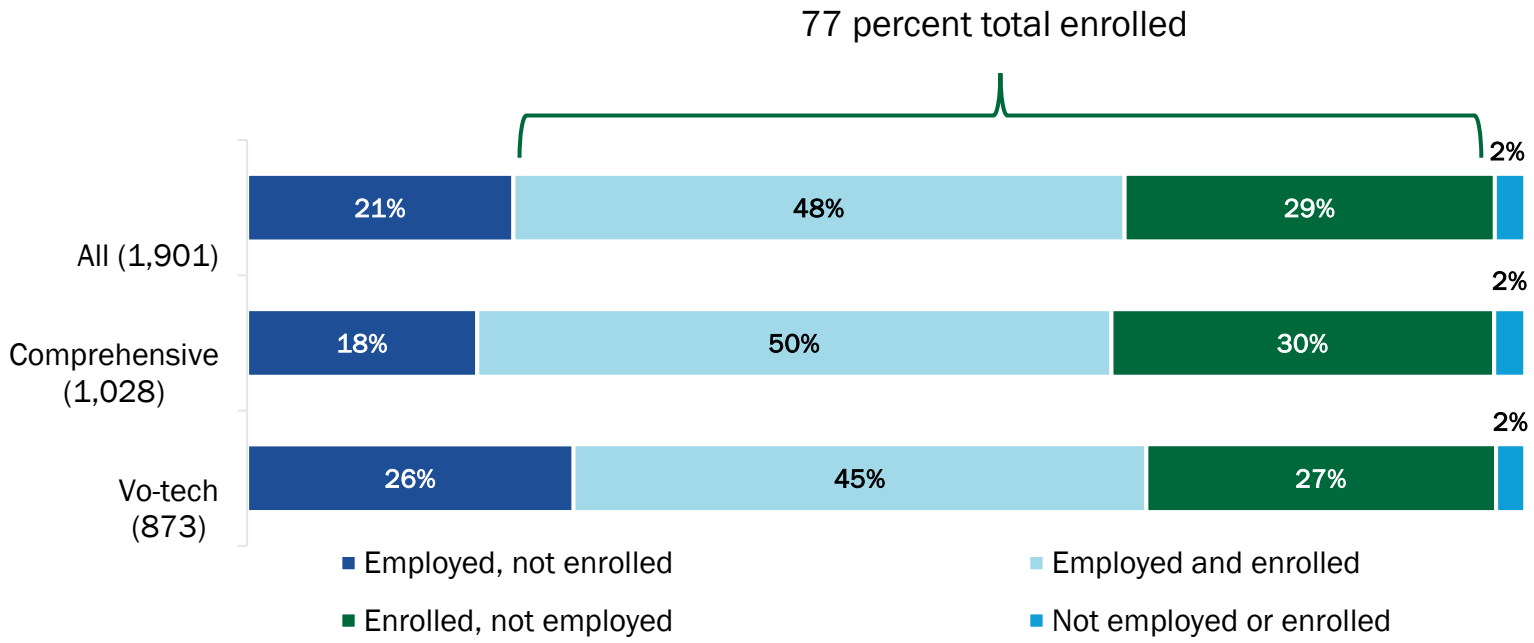


n=4,176

Data sources: Delaware Pathways Student Outcome Survey and the Delaware Department of Education

Eighteen months after high school, about 77 percent of 2022 and 2023 pathway graduates were enrolled in further education

Comprehensive had higher postsecondary enrollment rates than vo-tech graduates (80 and 72 percent, respectively ($p<.05$), with a difference of eight percentage points.



Data sources: Delaware Pathways Student Outcome Survey and the Delaware Department of Education

Immersive work-based learning (WBL) participation and post-secondary enrollment

Among 2022, 2023, and 2024 pathway graduates, immersive WBL participants had higher rates of postsecondary enrollment 6 months post high school overall ($p<.05$)

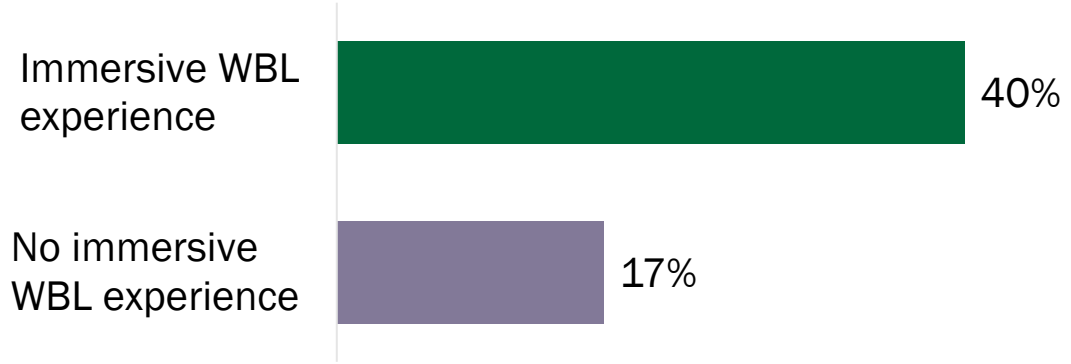
n=3,175

Like other associations reported in this study, the research design design does not support a causal assessment of the relationship between WBL and postsecondary enrollment, but instead provides evidence of an association, indicating that differences in postsecondary enrollment may reflect both WBL participation and underlying differences among students or schools.

Data sources: Delaware Pathways Student Outcome Survey and the Delaware Department of Education

Do pathway graduates who participated in work-based learning (WBL) during high school work in their pathway field post graduation?

Immersive WBL was associated with higher rates of pathway-aligned employment among employed 2023 graduates 18 months post-high school ($p<.01$)



n=1,005

No association was found between WBL participation and pursuing a pathway-related major.

Data sources: Delaware Pathways Student Outcome Survey and the Delaware Department of Education

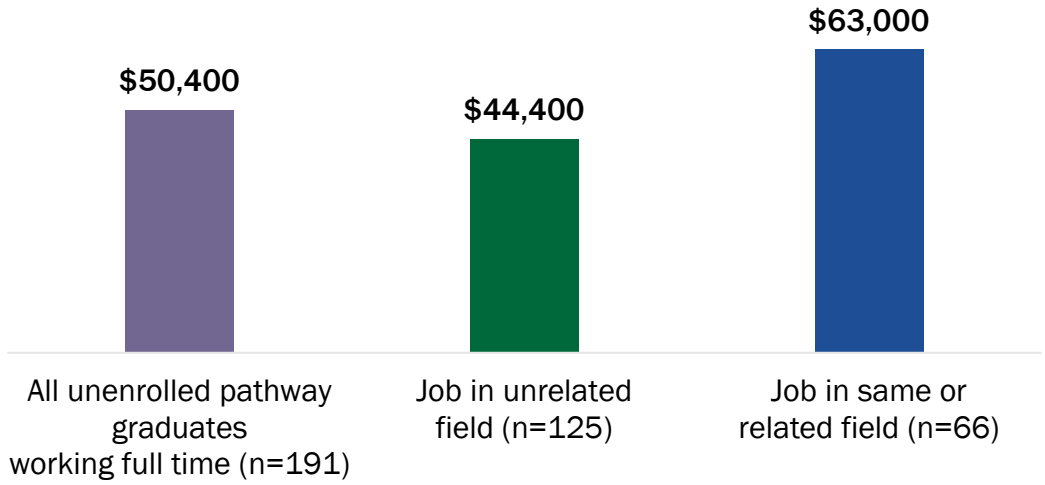
Employment and Wages for Unenrolled Pathway Graduates

About half of 2023 pathway graduates who were not enrolled in higher education and working 18-months after high school were working full time. Examples of pathway graduates working full time in their pathway field include an electrical trades pathway graduate working as a lineman for Baltimore Gas and Electric and a dental assisting pathway graduate working as a patient coordinator in a dental office.

Among this group, more of those working full time reported jobs in the same field as their high school pathway ($p<.05$)

n=361

Among these graduates who were working full time, average annualized wages were $45,000 for jobs unrelated to their high school pathway and $63,000 for related jobs ($p<.01$)

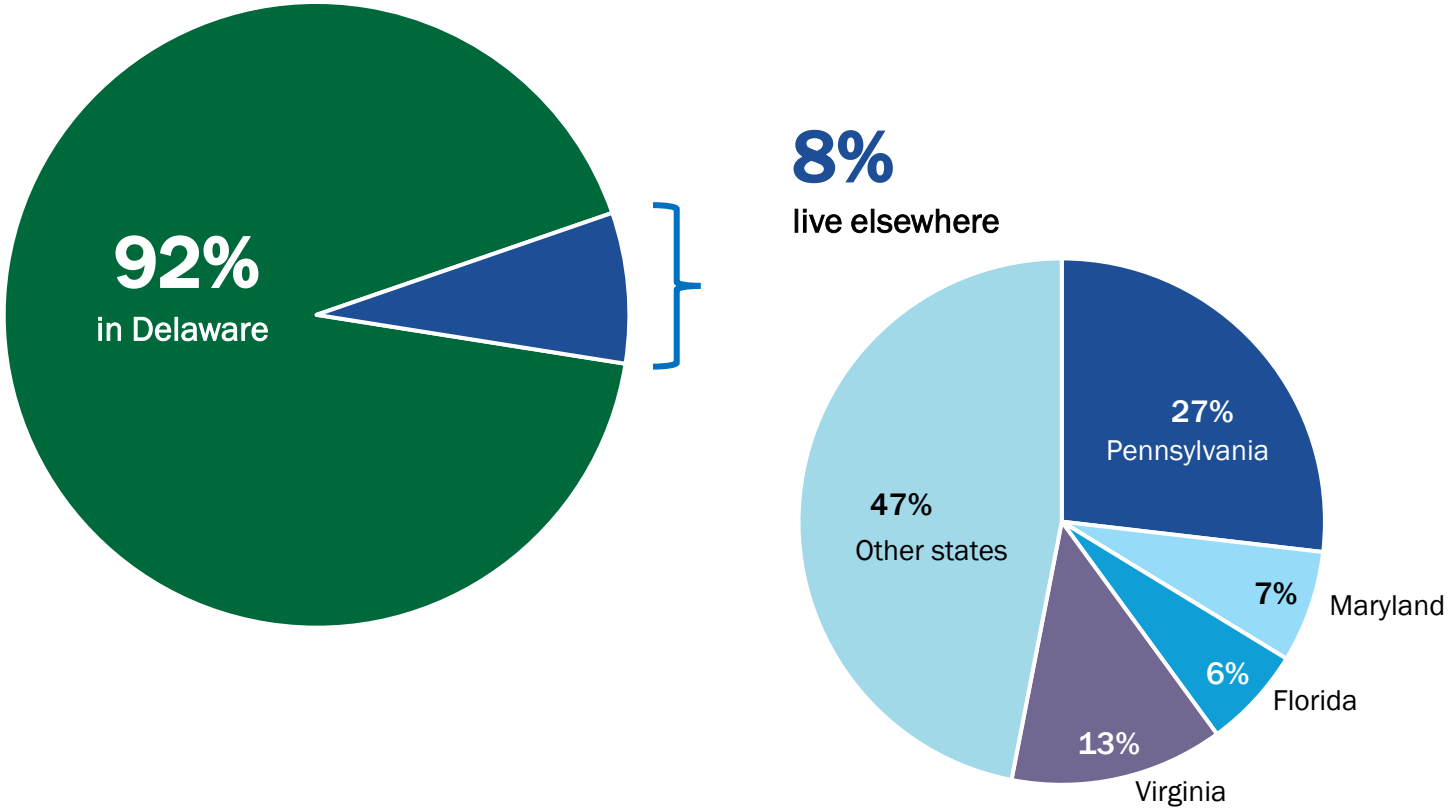


Data sources: Delaware Pathways Student Outcome Survey and the Delaware Department of Education

Where Pathway Graduates Live

Over 90 percent of 2021, 2022, and 2023 pathway graduates were living in Delaware at 6, 18, and 24 months after high school graduation. More than three quarters of those living out of state were enrolled in postsecondary education.

18 months after high school, 92 percent of 2022 and 2023 pathway graduates were living in Delaware



N=1,900
Note: States included in the “Other states” category each accounted for 5% of out-of-state graduates or fewer.

Data sources: Delaware Pathways Student Outcome Survey and the Delaware Department of Education

Implications for Policy and Practice

- **Career pathways can help close workforce gaps when aligned to labor market demand and paired with strong work-based learning.** The study results suggest that high school career pathways influence many students' postsecondary trajectories, underscoring the importance of aligning secondary programs with further education. That a third or more of graduates pursue pathway-related employment or further education suggests that high school pathways can play a role in meeting critical workforce needs, although further research is needed to understand variations by field.
- **Among pathway students, work-based learning is associated with postsecondary and employment success.** In the study sample, students who completed immersive WBL experiences during high school had higher rates of postsecondary enrollment six months after graduation and pathway-aligned employment 18 months post-graduation than non-participants. These findings support policies that expand access to sustained, high-quality WBL experiences, particularly those connected to employer partnerships.

Implications for Policy and Practice, continued

- **Stronger alignment between education pathways and early employment produces measurable economic benefits, but alignment is not automatic.** Although most early employment was part time and concentrated in service-sector jobs, graduates working full time in pathway-aligned employment had higher wages than peers in unrelated jobs. Although this analysis was exploratory, the finding underscores other research on the value of connections between schools and employers, which can help students translate pathway participation into sustained, career-aligned employment with the potential to offer higher earnings.
- **Equitable access to pathways and WBL requires system-level capacity and long-term data infrastructure.** Participation in immersive WBL was substantially higher in vocational-technical schools than in comprehensive high schools, pointing to uneven access across school types. The report further emphasizes the need for statewide longitudinal data systems and extended tracking beyond six months after graduation to fully capture pathway effects on employment and economic mobility.