

# Moving toward blurring systems to remove barriers

When we talk about something being a “blur,” we probably mean there’s not clarity, or in the instance of time, things go by so fast we can hardly take them all in.

Recently Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national education-to-employment, think-tank organization, put forth a body of thought on what the path forward for the nation is in solving its overarching workforce crisis. What they are calling for is a “Big Blur,” or a dissolution of barriers between the systems and structures of high school, college, and careers in a way that presently makes them extremely difficult to navigate.



The mission of JFF is to accelerate, “the alignment and transformation of the American workforce and education systems to ensure access to economic advancement for all.” It has been among the leading voices on things like Early College High Schools and Career Pathways for many years. In fact, the work underway in Doña Ana County through The Bridge of Southern New Mexico and its mission-related Workforce Talent Collaborative is heavily influenced by their work.

JFF is partnering with New Mexico on a broader scale through the Higher

Education Department and the Adult Education Division to bring these solutions to reality at scale. The state is a member of its Pathways to Prosperity Network, which seeks to strengthen the ability of states to remove barriers from education to employment, and especially for those who are most at risk of failing to successfully make the journey to high-value careers.

In its recently published paper, [The Big Blur: An Argument for Erasing the Boundaries Between High School, College, and Careers - and Creating One New System that Works for Everyone](#), JFF is calling for a restructure of grades 11 through 14 in order to increase success for more people. Rather than seeing high school and college as two separate things, they call for a clearer path to post-secondary credentials that aren't limited to a four-year degree.

The paper points out that while work has been underway nationally for many years, progress has been slow, and COVID made everything worse. The paper points out that about 20% of high school students who are accepted into college, and 40% from low-income houses, don't actually show up for college post-high school graduation.

Though surveys, the study identified that lack of information has significantly contributed to students' failure to pursue any type of higher education. Students expressed deep concern about the cost of college, while 45%-80% of college students reported feeling concerned about getting a job after graduation. This may be showing up in the lower enrollment rates in colleges since the pandemic began.

Among many recommendations in the report, the writers highlight the need for state-level alignment among cabinet secretaries to integrate education, higher education, workforce, and economic development to prepare the

future talent pipeline of any state. It discusses the significance of work-based learning for students as being critical to the success of such a system.

If none of this sounds new to you, there's a very good reason. This has been the focus of [The Bridge's work](#) all along, and we have come a long way in advancing this same vision. We are actively building a PK-14/16 system here in Doña Ana County, including Early College High Schools, the Blended Senior Year pilot in Gadsden, and a focus on Career and Technical Education for all students. It's just always nice to see your work validated at the national level.

As our nation struggles with talent shortages, crushing student loan debt, low college completion rates, and high poverty rates, we simply must move more boldly in accomplishing our own "blur." With our "blur," we will seek to bring far more clarity and connections across systems, rather than less, and propel our students forward toward bright futures that benefit them and our community.

*Tracey Bryan is president/CEO of the Bridge of Southern New Mexico.*

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