



NONCREDIT EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY: DEFINITIONS, DATA SYSTEMS, AND WORKFORCE PELL READINESS

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Abstract

As more adults pursue nondegree pathways for skill development and career advancement, and with the passage of Workforce Pell on July 4, 2025, which authorizes Pell Grants for training programs as short as 150 hours and eight weeks, the need for clear definitions and reliable data on noncredit education has become increasingly important. Standardizing a universal system will be key to turning these data into actionable information that helps New Jersey maximize the benefits of Workforce Pell.

This research report has four goals:

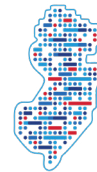
- ▶ Explore how national agencies, institutions, and research organizations define noncredit education;
- ▶ Examine New Jersey's noncredit education data infrastructure, including reporting practices, ongoing initiatives, and opportunities for enhancement or extension;
- ▶ Assess New Jersey's readiness for Workforce Pell; and
- ▶ Highlight promising practices from states like Iowa, California, Arkansas, and Connecticut, and offer recommendations to strengthen New Jersey's approach.

This work builds on New Jersey's existing noncredit data efforts, including significant research and leadership from the State Noncredit Data Project, offering New Jersey-specific recommendations, including how the New Jersey Statewide Data System (NJSDS) can be used to strengthen the state's noncredit data infrastructure.

Introduction

Across the United States, millions of adults are turning to nondegree education to upskill and advance their careers. More than two-thirds of adults considering further education now prefer short-term, flexible, nondegree options, highlighting a significant shift in how Americans approach learning (Van Noy & Hughes, 2022; Van Noy et al., 2008). Moreover, noncredit education has become a policy priority with the 2025 extension of Workforce Pell aid to workforce programs previously excluded from federal financial aid eligibility. While credit-based workforce programs remain important and are typically already eligible for Pell and included in existing higher education data collection, this new federal investment has sparked urgency around how noncredit education is defined and what data are being collected.

Noncredit learners represent a substantial student population but are undercounted in existing data collection systems. A recent survey estimated that 4.1 million students are enrolled in noncredit community college programs nationally (Xu et al., 2024). This figure, while substantial, may still underestimate actual participation, as data collection is hindered by inconsistent definitions and the absence of a standardized national reporting system (D'Amico et al., 2017). Noncredit learners, a population nearly equal in size to for-credit students, are largely missing in federal education data systems, such as the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (RTI International, 2020). Thirty-eight states attempt to collect data on noncredit programs, but the scope, quality, and methodology vary widely (Erwin, 2019). This lack of comprehensive data has led researchers to refer to noncredit education as "the hidden college," a vital yet underrecognized pillar of America's education and training ecosystem (Voorhees & Milam, 2005). Addressing this visibility gap is important as policymakers look to expand access to career-connected learning and prepare for Workforce Pell implementation.



This report is part of such efforts to better understand the noncredit education landscape in general and New Jersey's in particular. This report delineates how national agencies, institutions, and research organizations define noncredit education; examines New Jersey's noncredit education data infrastructure, including current reporting practices, data gaps, and recent initiatives to improve data quality; assesses New Jersey's readiness for Workforce Pell implementation; explores promising practices from other states; and offers recommendations to strengthen New Jersey's noncredit education data system. It builds on the work of the Education and Employment Research Center's State Noncredit Data Project¹ and outlines how NJSDS can be used to strengthen the state's noncredit data infrastructure and support Workforce Pell implementation.

Defining Noncredit Education

There are various ways the term “noncredit” is used, including to refer to a course, a credential, or instructions provided as part of a structured learning experience. Since the term could be used to refer to programs that lead to a for-credit certificate/credential or a noncredit certificate/credential, the term “noncredit” needs to be contextualized to clearly understand whether it refers to the form of instruction or the credential received.

Under IPEDS's definition, a noncredit course carries no academic credit toward a credential. Because noncredit students were — until the passage of Workforce Pell — ineligible for Title IV² aid and exempt from federal reporting requirements, IPEDS has not collected enrollment data on noncredit students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).³ States and institutions interpret and categorize noncredit programs independently without a standardized federal definition. While most state higher education systems distinguish between noncredit and credit-bearing courses, the criteria for these distinctions vary widely.

Colleges define noncredit education based on program purpose, institutional policy, and funding sources. Community colleges typically classify courses outside the for-credit catalog, such as workforce training, basic skills, or personal enrichment, as noncredit (Hughes & Van Noy, 2024). At four-year institutions, noncredit programs are typically administered through continuing education or extension divisions and include offerings outside the formal degree curriculum, even when they result in certificates of completion (Van Noy et al., 2008).

Although noncredit programs do not confer academic credit by definition, they may lead to nondegree credentials, such as industry certifications or licenses, institutional certificates, or digital badges. For example, a noncredit course might prepare students for licensing exams such as the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses. The variation in how institutions define and categorize programs reflects the diverse labor market needs they serve, resulting in a lack of a unified national definition of noncredit education. What qualifies as noncredit in one institution may be categorized differently at another institution, leading to inconsistent reporting and complicating efforts to standardize data across the sector. In some cases, even within the same institution, both credit and noncredit programs may prepare students for employment in the same occupation. This overlap can create confusion for students navigating training options and highlights the need for clearer definitions and greater alignment between credit and noncredit offerings.

¹ Funded by the National Science Foundation, the Strada Education Foundation, and the Gates Foundation, the Education and Employment Research Center's State Noncredit Data Project includes in-depth research with eight partner states, including Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, to improve the quality and use of noncredit education data (Education and Employment Research Center, n.d.).

² Title IV aid refers to federal student financial assistance authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965. It includes funding provided by the U.S. Department of Education to help eligible students pay for postsecondary education through grants, loans, and work-based programs. Only students enrolled in eligible for-credit programs at approved institutions can receive this aid (Dortch et al., 2024).

³ While this definition and exclusion remain current, the Workforce Pell Grant, effective July 1, 2026, will extend Title IV eligibility to eligible short-term, nondegree programs that meet federal guardrails. However, IPEDS has not yet announced plans to incorporate noncredit enrollment reporting as part of this change.



Beyond institutional differences, research and policy organizations define noncredit education based on program intent, such as workforce training, basic skills, or personal enrichment. The Education and Employment Research Center, for example, defines noncredit education as any college-delivered instruction that does not carry academic credit, and further categorizes programs by purpose (D'Amico et al., 2023; Van Noy, 2023). Although much of the research focuses on community colleges, workforce credentials are offered across multiple types of providers, including private career schools and other training organizations (Darolia & McGuinness, 2025). Many short-term workforce programs operate outside the federal Title IV financial aid system, relying instead on state funding, employer sponsorships, or other sources (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2020; Sedney & Lane, 2025). Credential Engine (2018) adopts an inclusive approach by categorizing credentials as either credit or noncredit based on the provider, allowing for comprehensive tracking of credentials across degrees, certificates, badges, and certifications. The Association of Community College Trustees similarly defines noncredit education as instruction that offers no academic credit toward a degree or diploma but may result in an industry credential. This includes areas such as continuing education, workforce training, remedial instruction, English as a Second Language, and preparation for high school equivalency examinations (Dziesinski & You, 2024). The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (n.d.) advocates for a standardized definition of noncredit education and supports the use of consistent taxonomies to improve comparability and reporting across states (Education Strategy Group, n.d.). In response to definitional inconsistencies, efforts are emerging to improve data collection and measurement. In the 2022–23 reporting cycle, IPEDS began asking institutions whether they offer noncredit education; however, while this is a step forward, more comprehensive data collection is still needed (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Other federal frameworks, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, require state workforce agencies to compile and report performance data from eligible training providers seeking WIOA funds to the U.S. Department of Labor (Code of Federal Regulations, 2025). However, as a rule, compliance with these reporting requirements varies across states (Jobs for the Future, 2024), and noncredit programs operating outside the scope of WIOA remain largely unaccounted for in federal workforce systems (Gable et al., 2023). Some states have created detailed taxonomies and centralized reporting systems, while other states delegate tracking to institutions or do not collect data (Van Noy & Hughes, 2022). As of 2023, about three quarters of states collected some noncredit data, but reporting remained inconsistent (D'Amico et al., 2023).

Therefore, noncredit education typically refers to the range of educational offerings at an institution that provides instruction as part of a structured learning experience and serves as an alternative to traditional for-credit education degrees offered by accredited educational institutions (Van Noy, 2023). Most noncredit education leads to various types of nondegree credentials, including for-credit certificates (which can be transferred toward a for-credit education), noncredit certificates (credentials awarded for completion of a noncredit educational program), industry certifications, occupational or professional licensure, apprenticeships, badges, and microcredentials (Van Noy, 2023).

Workforce Pell Grant Requirements and Data Implications

The federal Workforce Pell Grant program, authorized under Section 83002 of the 2025 budget reconciliation law amending Section 401 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, expands federal financial aid eligibility to short-term workforce training programs lasting 8 to 15 weeks (150 to 599 clock hours), beginning July 1, 2026 for the 2026–27 academic year (Higher Education Act §401(k), as amended by §83002). Under the Pell Act, only programs at Title IV-eligible institutions that have been in operation for at least one year prior to receiving funds are eligible to receive funds. The U.S. Department of Education and states will be required to verify program eligibility under strict federal guidelines (Dortch, 2024; Sudow et al., 2025). Eligible



programs must align with high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations; meet employer needs; and lead to stackable and portable credentials (Olmstead, 2025). Participating institutions also must meet accountability metrics, including 70% completion within 150% of normal time, 70% job placement within 180 days, value-added earnings that exceed program costs three years post-completion, and verification that graduates earn more than the average high school graduate in their respective state (U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2025). This multi-layered approval and reporting structure requires a sophisticated state data infrastructure, which poses a particular challenge for noncredit education programs that are often underrepresented in higher education data systems (Weissman, 2023). Effective preparation will require cross-agency coordination and rapid updates to the data system to ensure that noncredit student outcomes are captured in the months ahead. The next section of this report examines New Jersey's readiness, focusing on whether its current data meet federal requirements.

New Jersey Noncredit Education Landscape

New Jersey maintains multiple systems for collecting and reporting data on noncredit education, reflecting the involvement of both higher education and workforce agencies in overseeing training programs. The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) and the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOLE) each collect data on noncredit education programs, but their definitions, reporting requirements, and coverage differ. In 2021–22, New Jersey community colleges served 38,000 noncredit students, and by 2024, the state's Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL), a WIOA and state statutorily mandated registry of programs eligible for federal and state workforce funding, listed approximately 4,000 credit and noncredit programs across over 500 providers (New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2023). Both figures underscore the scale of noncredit education in the state.

OSHE uses a version of the federal IPEDS definition of noncredit education, which includes courses “not covered by enrollment reports to IPEDS” and do not award degree-applicable credit (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2023, p. 3). OSHE requires community colleges to annually report enrollment and demographic data on all noncredit courses/experiences from the prior fiscal year period (July 1 through June 30) through the Student Unit Record (SURE) - Noncredit Open Enrollment File, which includes various data on individual students and noncredit courses/experiences those students were engaged in during that timeframe. Since the SURE noncredit file collects data at the student and course level rather than at the program level, its usability for policy and practice is limited (D'Amico & Van Noy, 2025; Srivastava et al., 2024). Specifically, the data cannot be used to determine which programs the courses are part of, the workforce needs and industries those programs serve, or their employment outcomes. Additionally, OSHE does not collect noncredit data from public four-year and private not-for-profit and for-profit degree-granting institutions (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2023).

New Jersey is unique among states in that participation in the ETPL is mandated by both state and federal law (N.J.S.A. 34:15C-10.2). In New Jersey, all programs wishing to receive state or federal job training funds are required to be on the ETPL and report quarterly student data. NJDOLE maintains ETPL data and tracks outcomes for workforce training programs, regardless of the credentials they confer. In addition, all private career schools as defined by New Jersey state law are on the ETPL. The data collected through these requirements is used to generate the state's publicly accessible Consumer Report Card, which appears on the state's [New Jersey Training Explorer](#) and empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their training options by providing transparent information on program outcomes and quality (N.J.S.A. 34:15C-10.2). The ETPL includes detailed information on program length, clock/credit hours, type, cost, and credential, enabling verification of instructional hours, institutional eligibility, and alignment with in-demand occupations through occupational codes, workforce board approvals, and licensing data (Vinton & Van Noy, 2024). The ETPL also tracks key data elements, such as completion dates,



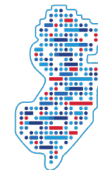
tuition and fees, credential types, and student demographics, which could support calculation of completion within 150% of normal time, job placement within 180 days, and value-added earnings that compare post-training wages to program costs and to the state's high school earnings benchmark (Vinton & Van Noy, 2024). And because providers are required to provide students' Social Security Numbers as part of the reporting requirements, these data enable the measurement of employment (including industry affiliation) and wage outcomes. As a result, NJDOL's ETPL serves as the primary source of data on noncredit programs and, therefore, for determining Workforce Pell eligibility and compliance.

While New Jersey does not yet have a single system to capture all noncredit education participation, it has undertaken several initiatives to strengthen its noncredit data coordination and visibility. The state is an official participant in the State Noncredit Data Project, a research initiative led by the Education and Employment Research Center at Rutgers University that supports states in building stronger data infrastructure for noncredit education (Education and Employment Research Center, n.d.). Through this project, OSHE and NJDOL have independently collaborated with Education and Employment Research Center researchers to document, categorize, and evaluate the noncredit data collected within their respective systems. This collaboration has resulted in several State Noncredit Data Project reports, including analyses of OSHE's noncredit data system and a review of NJDOL's ETPL (Vinton & Van Noy, 2024; Srivastava et al., 2024). One significant outcome of the State Noncredit Data Project has been the development of a noncredit data taxonomy, a standardized framework for defining and classifying noncredit program data (D'Amico et al., 2025). The taxonomy was developed in two phases. In the first developmental phase, Education and Employment Research Center researchers reviewed the noncredit data infrastructure of three partner states⁴ to create a taxonomy organized into four primary sections with data subcategories (D'Amico et al., 2023). In the second phase, field testing, Education and Employment Research Center researchers collaborated with five states and applied the original taxonomy to their noncredit data systems (D'Amico et al., 2025). The inclusion of the NJDOL ETPL in this testing phase revealed gaps in the first edition of the taxonomy related to accessibility, provider information, and student services (Van Noy et al., 2024; D'Amico et al., 2025). Based on these learnings from NJDOL's ETPL system, the original data categories were expanded, resulting in the release of Taxonomy 2.0 (D'Amico et al., 2025). Given that this revised taxonomy was field tested using NJDOL ETPL and OSHE's SURE - Noncredit Open Enrollment File, among other state noncredit systems, it can be used to guide standardization of data collection and reporting across the state's noncredit data systems.

Other efforts to increase data transparency are also under way in New Jersey. Since 2000, NJDOL's Consumer Report Card, which contains performance information about training programs on the ETPL published onto the New Jersey Training Explorer, has been publicly available (John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, n.d.). NJDOL also integrates credential data from training programs listed on the ETPL into Credential Engine's National Credential Registry,⁵ an open-source data repository that connects credential information nationally and internationally (Credential Engine, n.d.-b; New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2020, 2023). This makes credentials from New Jersey's ETPL-listed training programs part of a transparent and searchable national directory, where they can be compared seamlessly with credentials from other providers across states. This allows users to compare program details, such as cost and location. NJDOL plans to publish the Consumer Report Card outcomes in the Credential Registry, which will provide comprehensive labor market outcome information, including employment rates, median earnings, and industry affiliation. This will enable users to make data-driven career decisions. Additionally, NJDOL has launched the New Jersey Training Explorer, a public-facing, searchable catalog of training programs that serves as the public interface for the state's ETPL information and outcomes data (New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, n.d.-b). The Training Explorer enables users to search for approved training programs and view program-level details, as well as associated employment outcomes (New

⁴ Iowa, Louisiana, and Virginia.

⁵ The nonprofit Credential Engine maintains the Credential Registry, an open-access, cloud-based data repository. Credential Engine uses Credential Transparency Description Language to standardize and publish credential information to the registry. This process allows credential comparability across different providers and systems, regardless of their original format (Credential Engine, n.d.-a).



Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, n.d.-a). These tools make the ETPL data transparent and publicly accessible, providing students and policymakers with comprehensive information to make informed decisions about education and career choices (Vinton & Van Noy, 2024).

New Jersey has also established data integration capabilities through the [NJSDS](#) to analyze education and labor market outcomes of workforce training programs. NJSDS is a secure, multi-agency data-sharing collaboration that links K-12, higher education, and workforce records. NJSDS is housed at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Although OSHE's SURE Noncredit Open Enrollment file is not yet integrated into NJSDS, NJDOL's ETPL data are integrated into NJSDS, allowing long-term analyses of quality and performance at the provider, career cluster, and program levels. Overall, New Jersey has a well-developed, noncredit data infrastructure, providing a strong foundation for future enhancements.

Table 1 describes the information available across New Jersey's current noncredit data systems to meet the federal Workforce Pell eligibility requirements. The rows list specific federal requirements. The first two columns show the related information in the ETPL and SURE systems. The New Jersey noncredit potentials column explains how connecting ETPL and SURE with other education and employment records through NJSDS could allow the state to validate eligibility conditions and generate accountability metrics that are not currently possible within individual systems. The final column on recommendations outlines aspirational next steps that would enable the state to fully meet Workforce Pell reporting and accountability requirements.

Table 1: Federal Workforce Pell Guardrails and New Jersey Noncredit Education Data Assessment

Federal Workforce Pell guidelines	NJDOL ETPL	OSHE SURE - Noncredit open enrollment file	New Jersey noncredit potentials	Recommendation actions/readiness steps
<p>Program length and program type (aims to be used for programs of at least 150 clock hours of instruction, but fewer than 600 clock hours, during a minimum of 8 weeks, but fewer than 15 weeks. Programs may be offered in in-person, hybrid, or distance education formats; correspondence courses are not eligible.)</p>	<p>Captures total contact hours; includes delivery mode (in-person/online). Providers' identification (ID), program ID, and student data can be used to determine how long a program has been offered.</p>	<p>Course-level duration recorded, but program-level information and aggregation are not available.</p>	<p>Potentially capture the noncredit landscape more effectively through information on ETPL and non-ETPL providers from SURE.</p> <p>ETPL metadata can be merged with SURE to validate program hours and weeks.</p>	<p>Include program IDs in SURE that are comparable and linkable to ETPL program IDs; require colleges and providers to report total hours and weeks of program where missing.</p>
<p>Provider is Title IV-eligible and accredited, and has operated for ≥ one year</p>	<p>Contains provider name, type, and approval dates; allows cross-checking with federal Title IV rosters.</p>	<p>Captures institutional codes for community colleges.</p>	<p>NJSDS can merge ETPL provider data with federal Title IV rosters to identify eligible institutions and verify programs that have been in operation for at least one year.</p>	<p>Include provider and program identifiers in SURE as recommended above. Record the initial offering date for each program and provider in SURE and ETPL. Maintain a central crosswalk linking ETPL providers to Title IV status.</p>



Federal Workforce Pell guidelines	NJDOLE ETPL	OSHE SURE - Noncredit open enrollment file	New Jersey noncredit potentials	Recommendation actions/readiness steps
High-skill, high-wage, or state in-demand occupation determination	Captures Standardized Occupational Classification (SOC) and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes, which can help determine high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations.	SOC and CIP codes not captured.	Identify programs that meet WIOA and Perkins definitions for alignment with high-skill or high-demand occupations definitions, based on the NJDOLE demand occupations list, a SOC-CIP crosswalk, and NJDOE's industry value credentials. Potentially determine programs that are high-wage using linked student wage data in NJSDS.	<p>Include CIP codes and program ID in SURE.</p> <p>Continue to report annual in-demand occupations; refine operationalization of high-skill threshold.</p>
Credential type (leads to a recognized credential that has labor market value, and is stackable and portable) and credit articulation	Records the credential type for each program (e.g., license, industry certification, college certificate, GED, certificate of completion, or apprenticeship certificate). Licensure requirements are included in program descriptions. Credit accumulated field can be used to determine credit articulation.	Not captured.	ETPL credential data can be linked to student enrollments and employment outcomes to assess the stackability and portability of the credential over time. Similarly, if credential fields are included in SURE, the stackability and benefit of such credentials can be assessed over time.	<p>Establish ETPL's credential taxonomy as the statewide standard; embed credential type fields in SURE for consistency across systems.</p> <p>Collect information from program providers on whether they have formal credit articulation agreements.</p>
Completion rate \geq 70% within 150% of the normal time	Captures individual student completion and exit dates; capable of producing program-level completion rates.	Contains student identifiers and registrations, but no completion information; does not link completions to specific programs.	When a shared program ID and completion information exist in SURE, NJSDS would facilitate the consistent calculation of completion rates across SURE and ETPL. NJDOLE has established a unique quality assurance framework that accounts for variations in student demographics when measuring providers' and programs' performance. This framework can be extended to access providers in SURE.	Require noncredit education completions information in SURE is linked to program IDs.



Federal Workforce Pell guidelines	NJDOLE ETPL	OSHE SURE - Noncredit open enrollment file	New Jersey noncredit potentials	Recommendation actions/readiness steps
Job placement rate \geq 70% within 180 days	Post-enrollment employment status is calculated and included in the New Jersey Consumer Report Card to meet the state mandate for the ETPL to collect and display provider and program performance data.	Employment data not captured.	Building internal capacity, NJSDS staff can help support the linkage of student identifiers to Unemployment Insurance wage records for programs and compute placement rates for all students and programs within the 180-day window in ETPL and SURE using a consistent framework as described above.	Include provider and program identifiers in SURE.
Value-added earnings exceed program costs ⁶	Captures tuition, fees, and total program costs for each program.	Tuition and fee data not collected for noncredit courses.	ETPL cost fields will be merged with in- and out-of-state Unemployment Insurance wage records to calculate value-added earnings post-completion.	IPEDS should require colleges to report tuition and cost data for noncredit programs. SURE could also require the reporting of tuition for noncredit programs.
Data publication and federal reporting	Publishes program information in the New Jersey Training Explorer and Consumer Report Card as well as Credential Registry, including program costs and employment indicators. Also reported to the U.S. Department of Labor for WIOA in the annual Eligible Training Provider 9171 report.	Data used internally for research and planning; not publicly reported.	NJSDS can generate state and federal Workforce Pell metric extracts that combine ETPL program metadata with SURE noncredit program and student outcomes for the state, and submit them to the U.S. Department of Education.	Develop a standardized Workforce Pell metrics guideline for reporting and transparency.

Note: Federal Workforce Pell Grant guardrails were drawn from the *Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act (H.R. 6585)*, *Section by Section Summary* published by the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce (2025) and *Workforce Pell Watch* by Wesley Whistle, project director for student success and affordability at New America. Information on the ETPL was obtained from the New Jersey Workforce Provider Data Snapshot (Vinton & Van Noy, 2024), specifically from “Table 1: NJDOLE State-Level Noncredit Inventory.” Information on SURE was taken from New Jersey Community Colleges Data Snapshot (Srivastava et al., 2024), specifically “Table 2: State-Level Noncredit NJ OSHE Data Inventory.”

⁶ Value-added earnings are currently expected to be calculated by the U.S. Department of Education through federal data sources.



State Comparison of Noncredit Data Systems

As New Jersey agencies continue to meet regularly to identify further opportunities for collaboration to address noncredit data systems and improve data quality, the state can gain valuable lessons from approaches other states have taken to strengthen their noncredit data systems. This section highlights practices from Iowa, California, Arkansas, and Connecticut, followed by recommendations to further inform New Jersey's noncredit data system.

Iowa

The National Skills Coalition (2024a) has recognized Iowa as a leading state for noncredit education data infrastructure. Iowa's management information system (MIS) has included noncredit students since the late 1990s (Iowa Department of Education, 2023). It has developed data systems and funding mechanisms for noncredit programs comparable to those for credit-bearing programs (Iowa Department of Education, 2023). Iowa provides state formula funding and targeted workforce education grants for community college noncredit programs tied to reporting requirements to incentivize colleges to report complete data (National Skills Coalition, 2024b). For data collection purposes, Iowa defines a noncredit program as any course that totals more than 32 contact hours (D'Amico et al., 2022). The state uses this definition to filter occupational training from short-term or recreational courses that are relevant to the labor market (D'Amico et al., 2022). The Iowa Department of Education stores noncredit student-level records from all 15 community colleges in the community college MIS, which is integrated into the state's longitudinal data system (Advance CTE, 2025; Iowa Department of Education, n.d.-a). Through its longitudinal data system, Iowa links noncredit records with wage, postsecondary enrollment, industry certification, and licensure system records, which allow the state to analyze a comprehensive list of noncredit outcomes such as post-program employment status, wage progression over time, industry of employment, attainment of industry-recognized credentials, and transitions to credit-bearing education (Advance CTE, 2025; Iowa Department of Education, n.d.-a).

Iowa publicly shares noncredit outcomes through dashboards and data briefs as part of its commitment to data transparency (Iowa Department of Education, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). The Iowa Department of Education publishes an annual noncredit career and technical education outcomes report. It regularly updates noncredit outcomes on the noncredit program outcomes dashboard through the student outcomes portal (Iowa Student Outcomes, n.d.-a). These resources include multiple outcomes, such as completions, headcounts, wages, and credential attainment by program and institution; these metrics are disaggregated by student characteristics (Iowa Student Outcomes, n.d.-b). Furthermore, Iowa uses noncredit outcomes data to make important institutional and state decisions (D'Amico et al., 2022). Community colleges receive reports that compare their noncredit student outcomes to statewide benchmarks, enabling them to assess program performance and identify areas for improvement (National Skills Coalition, 2024b; Iowa Student Outcomes, n.d.-b). Policymakers use noncredit outcomes data at the state level to inform their creation of a workforce strategy. For example, programs demonstrating favorable employment and wage outcomes are more likely to receive priority for workforce funding streams (National Skills Coalition, 2024c). The data also play a crucial role in approving and renewing noncredit offerings, ensuring that programs align with labor market demand and deliver actual value to learners and employers (Iowa Department of Education, 2023).

California

California collects and reports noncredit education data across community colleges and K-12 adult education programs (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-a). The Chancellor's Office MIS captures noncredit data from all community colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-a). This information is publicly available through the California Community Colleges' Data Mart portal (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.-b). Similarly,



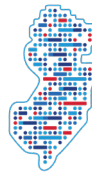
TOPSpro Enterprise, developed by Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems, is used by California's adult education programs to collect and report noncredit student data for statewide accountability purposes (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2024). California links aggregated outcomes from the two data systems at the state level. The LaunchBoard Adult Education Pipeline displays aggregated noncredit outcomes for community colleges, using data from the Chancellor's Office MIS, and for K-12 adult education providers, by using data from TOPSpro Enterprise (Cal-PASS Plus, 2023). This integration allows California to understand how students transition between K-12 adult schools and community college noncredit programs (Cal-PASS Plus, 2023). California also links noncredit education data to postsecondary and workforce outcomes. The adult education pipeline separately links community college and K-12 data to the Employment Development Department's Unemployment Insurance wage file and the National Student Clearinghouse and public college systems, allowing California to understand the long-term education and employment pathways of noncredit learners (Cal-PASS Plus, 2022, n.d.).

The Cal-PASS Plus LaunchBoard dashboard features the Adult Education Pipeline data, which are beneficial for reporting and transparency (Cal-PASS Plus, n.d.). Through the LaunchBoard, policymakers and the public can access annual reports on noncredit education metrics statewide and at the institutional level, with filters for student enrollment, progress, transitions to credit programs, credential attainment, and employment outcomes (Cal-PASS Plus, n.d.). This dashboard is a standout example of noncredit data reporting across states because of its strong focus on equity (California Community Colleges, 2022). It offers user-friendly interactive filters and visualizations that compare outcomes across demographic characteristics (WestEd, 2022). The dashboard also includes equity gap charts that display disparities in noncredit outcomes for gender, race/ethnicity, age, and economically disadvantaged students across various noncredit outcomes (Cal-PASS Plus, n.d.; WestEd, 2022). This level of analysis enables policymakers to identify equity gaps in access to and completion of noncredit programs, allowing them to tailor support accordingly.

Arkansas and Connecticut

Iowa and California are strong examples of states with established infrastructures for collecting and reporting noncredit data. However, this capacity remains limited. Like three quarters of states that collect some noncredit data, their efforts are primarily focused on community colleges and a subset of eligible postsecondary institutions. These states have made important strides in tracking noncredit activity, particularly from community colleges and workforce training providers that operate outside the scope of WIOA funding and reporting requirements (D'Amico et al., 2023). Still, their data systems largely exclude noncredit offerings from public and private four-year institutions, as well as many private providers of workforce training. As a result, the universe of noncredit programs remains significantly underreported, limiting the ability to thoroughly analyze nondegree education outcomes across the state.

In contrast, states like Arkansas and Connecticut have taken different approaches to expanding the breadth of their noncredit data collection. In 2024, the Arkansas Division of Higher Education implemented updated noncredit workforce reporting requirements, requiring all public two- and four-year institutions to submit annual noncredit workforce training data through the Arkansas Higher Education Information System (Arkansas Division of Higher Education, 2024a, 2024b). While private institutions are not required to report, they must do so to remain eligible for the Arkansas Workforce Challenge scholarship program (LaPrad, 2024). Though public reporting is not yet available and documentation remains limited, Arkansas's policy shift marks an important step toward broadening the state's understanding of its noncredit education landscape.



In comparison, Connecticut established a statutory reporting requirement through Public Act 16-44, codified in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10a-57b, requiring public institutions and private occupational schools to submit annual data on sub-baccalaureate certificate programs, including noncredit offerings (Connecticut General Assembly, 2016). Subsequent policy proposals have continued to emphasize the importance of coordinated data collection across education and workforce systems (Connecticut Governor's Office, 2021). As with Arkansas, publicly available information on implementation and data accessibility remains limited and evolving. Nonetheless, these efforts reflect a broader movement toward developing more comprehensive and inclusive state-level data systems to capture the full scope of noncredit education and workforce training.

Recommendations for New Jersey

New Jersey has a solid infrastructure and foundation for its noncredit data. To further achieve comprehensive statewide coverage of noncredit activity across New Jersey's postsecondary institutions, the state can take several steps that will better position its noncredit data systems to verify program eligibility and fulfill reporting requirements under the Workforce Pell Grant.

Key Recommendations

- ▶ **Codify a statewide noncredit data and outcomes reporting system.** New Jersey needs a complete picture of noncredit workforce activity across all institutions, and it is currently unknown what programs remain unlisted on the ETPL. To build comprehensive coverage, New Jersey can leverage its proven ETPL infrastructure as a universal noncredit reporting system. All institutions would register their workforce education offerings, including both credit and noncredit courses, regardless of their public funding status, and follow the ETPL's existing standards and procedures. This would extend the ETPL's robust data collection framework to capture workforce programs across all institution types in a standardized format. Centralizing all workforce program data through the ETPL would create a unified repository with standardized information across providers. To make this expansion manageable, New Jersey could implement it in phases. As of April 2026, all but 1 of the 19 community colleges in the state participate in the ETPL. The first phase would focus on community colleges that do not report all of their career-focused noncredit programs on the ETPL. Community colleges represent the largest share of noncredit program enrollment. The second phase would extend to public four-year degree-granting institutions, followed by the third phase, which would cover all other institutions not already on the ETPL. This phased approach would enable the state to refine data collection processes, address implementation challenges, and build on lessons learned, while making steady progress toward comprehensive coverage of New Jersey's noncredit activities.

Since the ETPL is already included in NJSDS, expanding ETPL coverage would enable the state to evaluate the full spectrum of noncredit activities in New Jersey, including which noncredit programs lead to employment across all institution types, measure earnings gains by credential type and industry sector for the complete noncredit landscape, assess return on investment for both public and institution resources comprehensively, and examine transfer patterns as students move from noncredit to credit-bearing programs or accumulate credentials over time. Additionally, disaggregating these outcomes by student demographics would reveal any equity gaps across the entire education workforce system.

- ▶ **Operationalize Workforce Pell eligibility through rigorous transparent analysis.** NJDOL's Consumer Report Card on the Training Explorer currently provides information on ETPL-listed workforce programs, including program descriptions, costs, credential offerings, and employment and earnings indicators. It also includes detailed employment outcomes for individual ETPL programs, such as post-training wages and employment status (New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce



Development, 2023). Other states, such as Iowa and California, provide comprehensive dashboards that report student progress, employment, and wage outcomes across demographic groups. If the ETPL becomes the central repository for all workforce programs, New Jersey could expand its Consumer Report Card and Training Explorer to include all noncredit education programs, such as the community college programs and private providers not already in the ETPL; provide post-training outcomes across various demographic groups; and provide information on which providers are Workforce Pell-eligible.

- ▶ **Expand the ETPL as the universal reporting system for all noncredit workforce programs.** Building on the examples of Arkansas and Connecticut, as well as New Jersey Chapter 394 of Public Law 2021, which requires an annual teacher workforce report, New Jersey can take a significant step forward by codifying data collection for all public and private workforce training providers and reporting on noncredit progress into law. A statewide noncredit outcomes report would document program offerings, enrollment and completion patterns, wage and employment outcomes, equity indicators, and alignment with labor market needs. Such a mandate would establish a system-level foundation for Workforce Pell eligibility determinations and support ongoing planning and improvement across New Jersey’s education and workforce ecosystem.

Conclusion

Noncredit education plays a vital yet often underrecognized role in New Jersey’s broader education and workforce system. While the state collects noncredit data, its efforts are hampered by decentralized systems, resulting in incomplete tracking of noncredit outcomes. Nonetheless, New Jersey serves as a leader through the development of its ETPL, Consumer Report Card, and Training Explorer, and participating in the State Noncredit Data Project. Establishing the ETPL as a central repository for all workforce programs across New Jersey’s institutions would be an important next step toward building a comprehensive understanding of noncredit pathways and their outcomes. With its current infrastructure and inter-system connectivity, New Jersey is well positioned to meet Workforce Pell’s reporting and accountability standards, provided that continued cross-agency coordination and data maintenance efforts remain a priority. As New Jersey continues to strengthen its noncredit data infrastructure, it can go further than most states by capturing the full scope of noncredit education. This groundwork will make New Jersey well positioned to implement the Workforce Pell Grant and expand training participation.



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About the New Jersey Statewide Data System

The [New Jersey Statewide Data System](#) (NJSDS) is the State of New Jersey's centralized longitudinal data system for education and workforce data. Its mission is to safely use the state's existing administrative data for evidence-based policymaking. Developed in 2012 through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, NJSDS creates a single place where state education, postsecondary education, employment, and workforce longitudinal data are securely stored to help stakeholders make data-informed decisions to improve student learning and labor market outcomes. The data system is owned by the State of New Jersey and operated by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. NJSDS is a collaboration between the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the New Jersey Department of Education, and the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority.

About the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

The [John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development](#) at Rutgers University is devoted to transforming the workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. The center, based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, provides an independent source of analysis for reform and innovation in policymaking and employs cutting-edge research and evaluation methods to identify best practices in workforce development, education, and employment policy. It is also engaged in significant partnerships with the private sector, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to design effective education and training programs. It is deeply committed to assisting job seekers and workers attain the information, education, and skills training they need to move up the economic ladder.

As captured in its slogan, "Solutions at Work," the Heldrich Center is guided by a commitment to translate the strongest research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and government officials can use to strengthen workforce and workforce readiness programs, create jobs, and remain competitive. The center's work strives to build an efficient labor market that matches workers' skills and knowledge with the evolving demands of employers.