



ISSUE BRIEF | November 2024

# Oregon Noncredit Data Snapshot

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## Project Background

Adults seeking further education have long shown keen interest in noncredit education. An estimated 4 million people enroll in noncredit programs annually, and surveys have found that at least half of adults interested in further postsecondary learning seek an alternative to college degree programs<sup>1</sup>. Policymakers also recognize the potential value of noncredit and related programs. A 50-state scan identified state-led initiatives in 28 states, totaling at least \$3.8 billion, in support for attainment of short-term credentials.<sup>2</sup>

Given the growing interest and public investment in short-term alternatives to college degree programs, policymakers and practitioners generally agree on the importance of a strong evidence base to inform decision-making. Yet state collection and analysis of noncredit data remains inconsistent and difficult to use for policymaking purposes, making direct comparisons across states dauntingly hard. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers regularly encounter varying definitions, an absence of educational or labor market outcomes data, and overall data quality issues.<sup>3</sup> At the most basic level, very little is known about the characteristics of noncredit programs, such as their instructional time, instructional format, requirements for entry, linkages to further education, awarding agencies, cost, and credential types awarded. Better data on

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<sup>1</sup> Jacoby, T. (September 2021). *The indispensable institution: Taking the measure of community college workforce education*. Opportunity America. <https://opportunityamericaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/FINAL-survey-report.pdf>; Strada. (2020, September 16). *Public viewpoint: Interested but not enrolled: Understanding and serving aspiring adult learners*. <https://cci.stradaeducation.org/pv-release-september-16-2020/>

<sup>2</sup> Murphy, S. (2023). A typology and policy landscape analysis of state investments in short-term credential pathways. HCM Strategists. <https://hcmstrategists.com/resources/a-typology-and-policy-landscape-analysis-of-state-investments-in-short-term-credential-pathways>

<sup>3</sup> D'Amico, M. M. (2017). Noncredit education: Specialized programs to meet local needs. In K. B. Wilson & R. L. Garza-Mitchell (Eds.), *Forces shaping community college missions* (No. 180, pp. 57–66). *New directions for community colleges*. Jossey-Bass. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20281>; Erwin, M. (2019). Noncredit enrollment and related activities (NPEC 2019). National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, with US Department of Education funding; Romano, R. M., & D'Amico, M. M. (2021, July/August). How federal data shortchange the community college. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 53(4), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2021.1930978>

noncredit offerings within states will help inform ongoing measurement efforts and ensure those efforts are more grounded in the realities of noncredit delivery, financing, and learner outcomes.

With support from the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES)/National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) and key partners at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of Michigan, and University of California–Irvine are working with state leaders from across the country as part of the State Noncredit Data Project (SNDP). The SNDP examines noncredit data to achieve three key goals:

- Develop an inventory of and consistent operational definitions for state-level noncredit data elements to better understand the noncredit data infrastructure.
- Collect and examine noncredit course/program-level data to explore noncredit offerings and their associations with enrollment rates, outcomes, instructional characteristics, and financial arrangements.
- Uncover the drivers of noncredit offerings and produce relevant policy implications.

In addition to this analysis, the SNDP convenes a Learning Community of states on data for noncredit education and non-degree credentials. The Learning Community is designed to bring together state leaders to share current practices related to state noncredit data. Through our research and convening, SNDP seeks to lay the groundwork for common definitional language for future data collection and analysis efforts to improve the understanding of the value and quality of noncredit programs and non-degree credentials.

## Methods

This report is one in a series that explores the noncredit data infrastructure of US states and presents descriptive analyses of those data at the course/program and provider level. The findings presented in these reports were reached using a multi-phased collaborative approach with leaders in partner states. The first step was to engage with state partners about the context for noncredit and related data collection. This ongoing engagement included regular conversations, off-line questions, and the collection of relevant policy and process information on noncredit categories, determinants of noncredit success, instructional characteristics, finance, and related topics. The engagement process has been critical to understanding the state noncredit landscape and data collection.

The next step was to develop a robust inventory of each of the data elements potentially available from state agencies and organizations. Through engagement with state partners, cross-state meetings, a review of prior

literature and resources,<sup>4,5,6</sup> and program-level data analyses with our first three research states (Iowa, Louisiana, and Virginia), the project team created a noncredit data taxonomy<sup>7</sup> for the organization of relevant data elements. The key elements in the taxonomy—(1) purpose and design, (2) outcomes, (3) demographics and enrollment, and (4) finance—guide the organization of available data elements in the present report (see Table 1) and the subsequent analyses on providers and programs that follow. In this next phase of the project, the project team is working with an additional group of states (including South Carolina, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, and Tennessee) to understand the nature of their noncredit data.

## Oregon’s Policy Context for Noncredit

The Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) was formed in 2011 with the aim of consolidating and reorganizing the many agencies and organizations that provide regulation and authorization to Oregon’s postsecondary institutions.<sup>8</sup> HECC provides recommendations on postsecondary education policy and funding in Oregon to the governor and Chief Education Office.

Since this report will analyze HECC’s dataset of community college noncredit offerings, it is important to note the Commission’s responsibilities as they pertain to such institutions, which include administering state and federal funds as well as providing funding recommendations to the governor and legislature for the Community College Support Fund (CCSF). The CCSF is one of the three primary funding sources for Oregon’s community colleges, along with revenue from tuition and local property taxes.<sup>9</sup>

The community colleges under HECC are relatively independent, having a large degree of autonomy except with regard to programs classified as degree- or certificate-oriented. Jurisdiction over Oregon’s community colleges, where much of the state’s noncredit educational activity takes place, has been passed from one state agency to another over time. This history of agency shuffling resulted in the creation of some administrative rules governing noncredit that remain on the books but are now somewhat outdated.

Nevertheless, Oregon community colleges exercise a high degree of local control over noncredit education, which is advantageous for tailoring offerings to the specific context of each school and the needs of local employers. There are disadvantages to the lack of coordination, however, including duplication of program

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4 D’Amico, M. M., Morgan, G. B., Robertson, S., & Houchins, C. (2014). An exploration of noncredit community college enrollment. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 62(3), 152–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2014.953438>; D’Amico, 2017.

5 IPEDS. (2021–22). Glossary. <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/public/glossary>

6 Jacoby, T. (2021). The indispensable institution: Taking the measure of community college workforce education. Opportunity America. <https://opportunityamericaonline.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/10/FINAL-survey-report.pdf>

7 D’Amico, M., Van Noy, M., Srivastava, A., Bahr, P., & Xu, D. (2023). Collecting and understanding noncredit community college data: A taxonomy and how-to guide for states. Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center. [https://sites.rutgers.edu/state-noncredit-data/wp-content/uploads/sites/794/2023/11/State-Noncredit-Taxonomy\\_EERC\\_11.17.23.pdf](https://sites.rutgers.edu/state-noncredit-data/wp-content/uploads/sites/794/2023/11/State-Noncredit-Taxonomy_EERC_11.17.23.pdf)

8 Hammond, B. (2013, April 14). Oregon higher education stands to get powerful new overseer. *The Oregonian/OregonLive*. [https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2013/04/oregon\\_higher\\_education\\_stands.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2013/04/oregon_higher_education_stands.html)

9 Higher Education Coordinating Commission. (n.d.). Community college funding. Retrieved May 3, 2024, from <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/about/postsecondary-finance-capital/pages/community-college-funding.aspx>

development efforts and resulting offerings across colleges, competition between colleges for students and funding, and the lack of a systematic method for the community colleges to track student articulation between noncredit and credit.

Oregon’s community colleges vary widely in their ratios of noncredit to credit enrollments. In the 2020–21 academic year, enrollment in noncredit offerings at Oregon community colleges ranged from 17 percent of enrollees at the most credit-heavy institution to almost 72 percent of enrollees at the most noncredit-heavy institution.<sup>10</sup> During this period, several institutions reduced or eliminated their adult basic education offerings. Additionally, many institutions shuttered their continuing education divisions, which house general self-improvement noncredit courses for adults, allowing them to explore areas of interest.<sup>11</sup> These reductions and eliminations were the result of a decline in noncredit enrollment that had begun some years before but accelerated dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, noncredit enrollment in Oregon has been bouncing back, with employer-contracted occupational training being especially common among noncredit offerings; enrollment in adult basic education offerings is on the upswing as well.

## *Funding*

In the 1960s and 70s, Oregon reimbursed community colleges based on term hours. In the 1980s, the state moved to a formula-based funding model.<sup>12</sup> The current formula, which incorporates an operating base in combination with per-FTE funding, was established in 1999.<sup>13</sup> However, the formula that informs the distribution of the CCSF is poised to change substantially over the next two years.

The new funding formula introduced by HECC is mostly enrollment based, but up to 10 percent of state funding for community colleges will be performance based. The performance-based components are divided into two parts: *student support* and *student success*. Student support is based on enrollment of priority populations, while student success is based on retention and graduation rates. Priority populations include low-income individuals, adult learners, enrollees in career and technical programs, and students of historically disadvantaged racial/ethnic backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> Completion of postsecondary credentials—both credit and noncredit—by members of priority populations is weighted at 150 percent in the new formula. Though some

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<sup>10</sup> National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Oregon higher education landscape study. Prepared for the Oregon Council of Presidents and the Oregon Community College Association. <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/public-engagement/Documents/Commission/Full-Commission/2022/Nov%2010/12.0a%20NCHEMS%20Final%20Report%202022.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Higher Education Coordinating Commission. (2023, January 1). *Oregon community college policy and process book*.

[https://www.oregon.gov/highered/about/community-colleges-workforce-development/Documents/2023\\_Oregon\\_Community\\_College\\_Policy\\_and\\_Process\\_Book.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/highered/about/community-colleges-workforce-development/Documents/2023_Oregon_Community_College_Policy_and_Process_Book.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Higher Education Coordinating Commission. (n.d.). Community college funding model review and recommendations 2023.

<https://www.oregon.gov/highered/public-engagement/Documents/Commission/Full-Commission/2023/4-June-8/11.2b%20Docket%20Item%20-%20CCSF%20Review,%20Final%20Report.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Higher Education Coordinating Commission, Community college funding.

critics of the new formula have argued that it leaves institutions with insufficient time to adapt, the formula will be phased in over the course of the next few years.<sup>15</sup>

Of note, most noncredit offerings in Oregon generate FTEs for institutions, boosting state funding. Reimbursable noncredit offerings – those that are eligible for state funding – tend to be occupational/vocational or pre-college/basic skills in nature. The occupational/vocational offerings can include career and technical education courses, incumbent worker training, and registered apprenticeships of any length. The pre-college/basic skills offerings—which consist of developmental education, basic skills, and adult continuing education courses—must include at least six hours of instruction to be reimbursable.

There are many other noncredit offerings for which the state does not provide reimbursement, many of which are personal interest/avocational in nature. Examples include community- or family-oriented offerings, fine arts-related offerings, small business development, and unstructured activities (e.g., tutoring, drop-in labs, maker spaces).<sup>16</sup> These offerings rely on cost retrieval, which means that they are funded through student fees rather than reimbursement from the state.

### *Drivers of Noncredit Data Collection*

Noncredit data collection in Oregon is driven in part by reporting requirements and ensuring state policy compliance. One of the most significant uses of noncredit data in Oregon is FTE auditing in continuing education programs. In addition, the performance-based components of the new funding model include noncredit completion, providing additional incentive to colleges to boost the accuracy and completeness of noncredit data collection.

The logistics of noncredit data collection in Oregon are somewhat discordant. Oregon does not have a statewide student information system (SIS); institutions use school-specific SIS, including modified versions of Banner, Jenzabar, and off-market software. Institutions use Webforms to submit noncredit offerings to HECC for approval, though Webforms has been used more for record keeping than for data integration. Oregon also uses Data for Analytics (D4A), which contains student data on all courses offered or taken in the state. It often is used when auditing offerings, though its usage otherwise is limited. Oregon is working on connecting the Webforms and D4A platforms.

### *Classifying Noncredit Offerings*

The Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development section of the Oregon Administrative Rules (Chapter 589) provides definitions of some key noncredit terms. Noncredit courses are courses that do not

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<sup>15</sup> Edge, S. (2023, February 10). Community colleges ask for more time before switch to funding based on student outcomes. The Oregonian/OregonLive. <https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2023/02/community-colleges-ask-for-more-time-before-switch-to-funding-based-on-student-outcomes.html>

<sup>16</sup> Higher Education Coordinating Commission. (2023, January 1). *Oregon community college policy and process book*.

offer college credit for completion and typically are not part of a credit-bearing educational program.<sup>17</sup> Noncredit students are those that complete a specified amount of adult education or noncredit workforce training in an academic year.<sup>18</sup>

Since 2015, Oregon community colleges have offered “Non-credit Training Certificates” (NCTCs). By definition, these certificates require between 18 and 210 hours, are transcribed, and have an associated assessment.<sup>19</sup> Although NCTCs provide a way for HECC to classify noncredit offerings, their parameters are insufficiently flexible to accommodate the whole range of potentially high-value noncredit programs. One effect of the development of NCTCs was to protect credit programs by preventing the duplication of some credit offerings on the noncredit side of institutions.

In Table 1, we summarize the alignment between the noncredit categories used by HECC and the categories used in SNDP’s noncredit data typology.<sup>20</sup>

*Table 1: Alignment of Noncredit Data Types with Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission Noncredit Categories*

Noncredit Types <sup>1</sup>	HECC Noncredit Category Names	HECC Noncredit Category Numbers
Open-Enrollment Occupational Training	Adult continuing ed, workforce	363
	CTE preparatory	210 and 211
Employer-Sponsored Training <sup>2</sup>	CTE supplementary	220
	CTE apprenticeship	230
	Adult continuing ed, unknown	360
Personal Interest	Adult continuing ed, health & fitness	361
	Adult continuing ed, safety	362
	Non-reimbursable, unknown	510
	Non-reimbursable, hobby & recreation	511
	English as a Second Language	310
Pre-College	Adult basic education	320
	General educational development (GED)	330
	Adult high school	340
	Postsecondary remedial	350, 351, and 352
Other	Non-reimbursable, other/administrative	512

Notes: This table excludes all courses designated as activity code 100 (lower division collegiate) because activity code 100 is deemed not eligible for use with noncredit courses in the *2023 Oregon Community College Policy and Process Book* ([https://www.oregon.gov/highered/about/community-colleges-workforce-development/Documents/2023\\_Oregon\\_Community\\_College\\_Policy\\_and\\_Process\\_Book.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/highered/about/community-colleges-workforce-development/Documents/2023_Oregon_Community_College_Policy_and_Process_Book.pdf), p. 52–3)

<sup>1</sup>Noncredit types based on D’Amico, 2017; D’Amico et al., 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Employer-sponsored occupational training is not clearly identified in the available data, but this noncredit type is approximated by the HECC category numbers listed here.

<sup>17</sup> Oregon Administrative Rules, Section 589-006-050

<sup>18</sup> Oregon Administrative Rules, Section 589-002-0110

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> D’Amico et al., *Collecting and understanding noncredit*.

## Data Inventory

Table 2 documents the degree to which HECC is capturing a range of noncredit data elements. During the first phase of the project, the SNDP team produced a report on noncredit data systems in three partner states (Iowa, Louisiana, and Virginia)<sup>21</sup> and developed a noncredit data taxonomy that was designed to serve as a primer for states as they begin to collect noncredit data or refine their existing data collection. The analysis in this report details whether information of each type is available on all, most (more than 2/3), many (more than 1/3 but fewer than 2/3), some (fewer than 1/3), or none of a state’s noncredit offerings. In Oregon, we were able to compare course-level data collection to program-level data collection, which was not possible in every state involved in this phase of the project.

*Table 2: State-Level Noncredit Data Inventory for Community Colleges in Oregon, as Maintained by the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission*

Category	Subcategory	State-Level Data Availability	
		Noncredit Courses	Noncredit Programs
Purpose and Design			
Field of Study	Course/program name	All	All
	CIP code	Some	Some
	SOC code	Some	Some
	Career cluster	Some	Some
Noncredit Type	Occupational, sponsored, pre-college, personal interest, or aligned with IPEDS		
	Occupational	Many	Most
	Pre-college	Many	None
	Personal interest	Some	None
Program Length	Employer sponsored	Some	None
	Number of courses if multi-course program	N/A	Many
	Total contact hours	All	All
Delivery	Face-to-face	None	None
	Face-to-face location	None	None
	Online	None	None
	Blended	None	None
	Competency based	None	None
	Work-based learning required	None	None
	Student service availability	None	None
Faculty data	None	None	

21 D’Amico, M., Van Noy, M., Srivastava, A., Bahr, P., & Xu, D. (2023). The state community college noncredit data infrastructure: Lessons from Iowa, Louisiana, and Virginia. Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center. Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center. <https://sites.rutgers.edu/state-noncreditdata/wpcontent/uploads/sites/794/2023/08/The-State-Community-College-EERC-8.2023.pdf>

Associated Credentials	Certifications, licensure, certificates, micro credentials associated with courses	Some	Some
Outcomes			
Academic Outcomes <sup>1</sup>	Students continue to credit	All	All
	Completion data availability	None	None
Labor Market Outcomes	Pre-enrollment employment	None	None
	Post-enrollment employment	None	None
	Pre-enrollment salary/wage	None	None
	Post-enrollment salary/wage	None	None
Non-Degree Credential Outcomes <sup>2</sup>	Industry certification	None	None
	Occupational licensure	None	None
	College-issued certificate	None	Some
	Microcredentials	None	None
	Apprenticeship	None	Some
Demographics and Enrollment			
Enrollments	Headcount	All	All
	Contact hours	All	All
Demographics	Race/ethnicity	Some	Some
	Age	Some	Some
	Sex/gender	Some	Some
Identifiers	Social Security number	None	None
	Institutional identification number	None	None
	Names	All	All
	Birth dates	Some	Some
Finance			
Tuition	Course/program tuition	None	None
State and Federal Funding	State reimbursement	All	All
	WIOA-eligible training provider	All	All
	Economic development incentive	None	None
	Other federal grants	None	None
	Other state grants	None	None

Notes.

<sup>1</sup>Some institutions use different registration systems for different types of offerings, thus rendering these data challenging to capture.

<sup>2</sup>Though institutions collect some data on non-degree credential outcomes, these data are stored locally at each institution and are not collected centrally by HECC.



## Findings

### *Purpose and Design*

Key findings on the purpose and design of noncredit offerings in Oregon include the following:

- About three-quarters of noncredit offerings in the data maintained by HECC fall into either the employer-sponsored occupational training category or the personal interest category. Nearly all of the remaining one-quarter of offerings are accounted for by pre-college. (See Table 3.)
- Pre-college offerings have significantly higher average clock hours than the other types of noncredit offerings. (See Table 4.)
- None of the clock hour averages in any category of noncredit offering are above 150 hours, the proposed Workforce Pell minimum threshold. However, some specific noncredit offerings documented in HECC have much higher clock hours, with about 2 percent of offerings having 150 clock hours or more.

*Table 3: Community College Noncredit Offerings by Noncredit Type, 2022–23*

Noncredit Types	Course Offerings	
	n	%
Open-Enrollment Occupational Training	344	2
Employer-Sponsored Occupational Training	5,487	37
Personal Interest	5,423	37
Pre-College	3,504	24
Other	65	< 1
	14,823	100

*Note.* The unit of analysis is a single section of a noncredit offering (course) at a college in a term. Multiple sections of a noncredit offering can occur in a single college in any given term.

*Table 4: Community College Noncredit Instructional Characteristics by Noncredit Type, 2022–23*

Noncredit Types	Median Clock Hours	Mean Clock Hours
Open-Enrollment Occupational Training	20	36
Employer-Sponsored Occupational Training	7	26
Personal Interest	10	14
Pre-College	55	58
Other	3	18
	15	29

*Note.* The unit of analysis is a single section of a noncredit offering (course) at a college in a term. Multiple sections of a noncredit offering can occur in a single college in any given term.

## Enrollment

Key findings on noncredit enrollment and demographics in Oregon include the following:

- Student headcount is split fairly evenly between the following types of noncredit offerings: employer-sponsored occupational training, personal interest, and pre-college. Most of the rest is open-enrollment occupational training. (See Table 5.)
- While some colleges may collect some demographic information about their noncredit students, HECC does not maintain these data, thus, they are not included in this analysis. Community colleges collect very limited data on their noncredit students, particularly for those enrolled in continuing education offerings.

*Table 5: Community College Noncredit Headcount Enrollment by Noncredit Type, 2022–23*

Noncredit Types	Student Headcount Enrollment	
	N	%
Open-Enrollment Occupational Training	4,798	3
Employer-Sponsored Occupational Training	61,557	33
Personal Interest	63,630	34
Pre-College	56,520	30
Other	1,694	< 1
	188,199	100

*Note.* The unit of analysis is a student enrollment in a noncredit offering. Students can be duplicated across offerings, colleges, and terms.

## Finance

Key findings on the financing of noncredit in Oregon include the following:

- Most noncredit offerings are factored into the state funding formula. (See Table 6.)
- Of the personal interest noncredit offerings, about two out of five (42%) are factored into the state funding formula and are usually characterized as various types of adult continuing education.

*Table 6: Community College Noncredit Financing by Noncredit Type, 2022–23*

Noncredit Types	Number of Offerings	% of Offerings Factored into State Funding Formula
Open-Enrollment Occupational Training	344	100
Employer-Sponsored Occupational Training	5,487	100
Personal Interest	5,423	42
Pre-College	3,504	100
Other	65	0
	14,823	77

*Note.* The unit of analysis is a student enrollment in a noncredit offering. Students can be duplicated across offerings, colleges, and terms.

## Conclusion

The Oregon HECC noncredit dataset provided the SNDP team with important insights that may be particularly relevant to states with maturing noncredit datasets.

- While the noncredit offerings of many other states’ datasets in this phase of the SNDP tend toward open-enrollment occupational training, almost three-quarters of offerings in the HECC dataset are employer-sponsored occupational training and personal interest, while just under one-quarter are pre-college. This unique distribution draws attention to the importance of understanding each state’s conceptions of and priorities for noncredit, since it shows that not every state’s dataset is as heavily weighted towards workforce-oriented offerings as may be expected based on prior analyses from the SNDP team.
- As the Oregon HECC dataset continues to evolve, it may be beneficial to develop strategies for capturing noncredit data that some or all of the colleges already collect, such as student demographics and non-degree credential outcomes. Relatedly, the Commission may want to consider working to inventory what data elements colleges collect that the HECC dataset does not yet capture.
- The Oregon HECC is working toward some major improvements in their noncredit data infrastructure. For example, the Commission is working on updating their coding of noncredit courses to indicate which ones are categorized as “Competency Based Education.” Another key development is the Commission’s efforts to fully connect their discrepant data collection mechanisms (D4A and Web Forms) to maximize the utility of the data.

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## Acknowledgements

We appreciate the insight, resources, and data provided throughout the project by our collaborators with the Oregon. While many were involved, we would like to convey special thanks to Oregon People. The authors would like to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their financial support. At EERC, Tracy Cangiano skillfully provided research support through various phases of the project, and Angel Butts of The Word Angel, LLC provided excellent editorial assistance. The authors are solely responsible for any errors.

This report was prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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