Do Low-Income Students Stack High-Value Credentials?
Differences in Credential-Stacking Between Students from Low- and Mid/High-Income Backgrounds

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Read Our Working Paper

https://www.edpolicyresearch.org/stackable

What are Stackable Credentials?

"A sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualifications and help that individual move along a career pathway" (US DOL, 2010, p. 6).
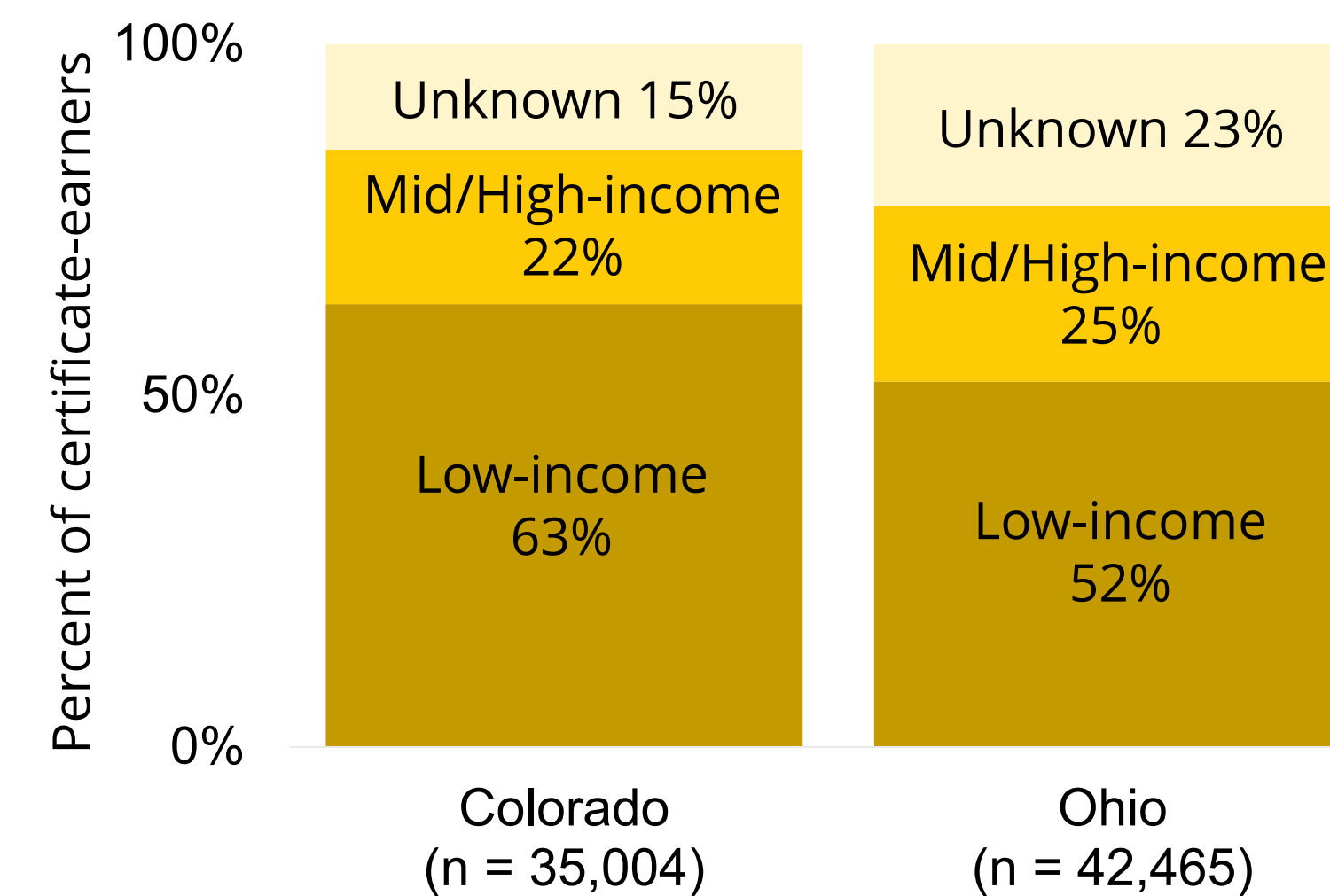
Research Questions

1. Are low-income individuals who earn a certificate less likely to **stack credentials** (earn an additional certificate or degree) than individuals of mid/high-income backgrounds?

2. Among individuals who stack credentials, are those from low-income backgrounds less likely to **stack high-value credentials** than those from mid/high-income backgrounds?

Data Sources

• Student-level, longitudinal administrative data on Colorado and Ohio community college students

• Student transcript records, matched data on employment & earnings from state unemployment insurance systems, and matched data from National Student Clearinghouse

About the Sample

• Working-age individuals (20 to 64) who earned an initial certificate from a CO or OH community college between 2006 and 2015

• *Low-income* = Pre-college earnings below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level; or, for CO students without earnings data but with a financial aid application, an Expected Family Contribution below the Pell Grant eligibility threshold

Colorado (n = 35,004): Unknown 15%, Mid/High-income 22%, Low-income 63%
Ohio (n = 42,465): Unknown 23%, Mid/High-income 25%, Low-income 52%

Finding: Low-Income Certificate Earners are More Likely to Re-Enroll, but (in Ohio) Less Likely to Stack Credentials

Colorado: Low-income individuals have **up to 29% greater odds of re-enrolling** in college, but about the same odds of stacking credentials as mid/high-income peers

Ohio: Low-income individuals have **up to 29% greater odds of re-enrolling** in college, but **up to 35% lower odds of stacking** credentials as mid/high-income peers

Notes. Results are based on discrete-time random effects logit models with controls for student characteristics, first certificate characteristics, local economic context, and time. See working paper for details.

Finding: Among Credential-Stackers, There is No Difference by Income Background in the Type of Credential Stacked
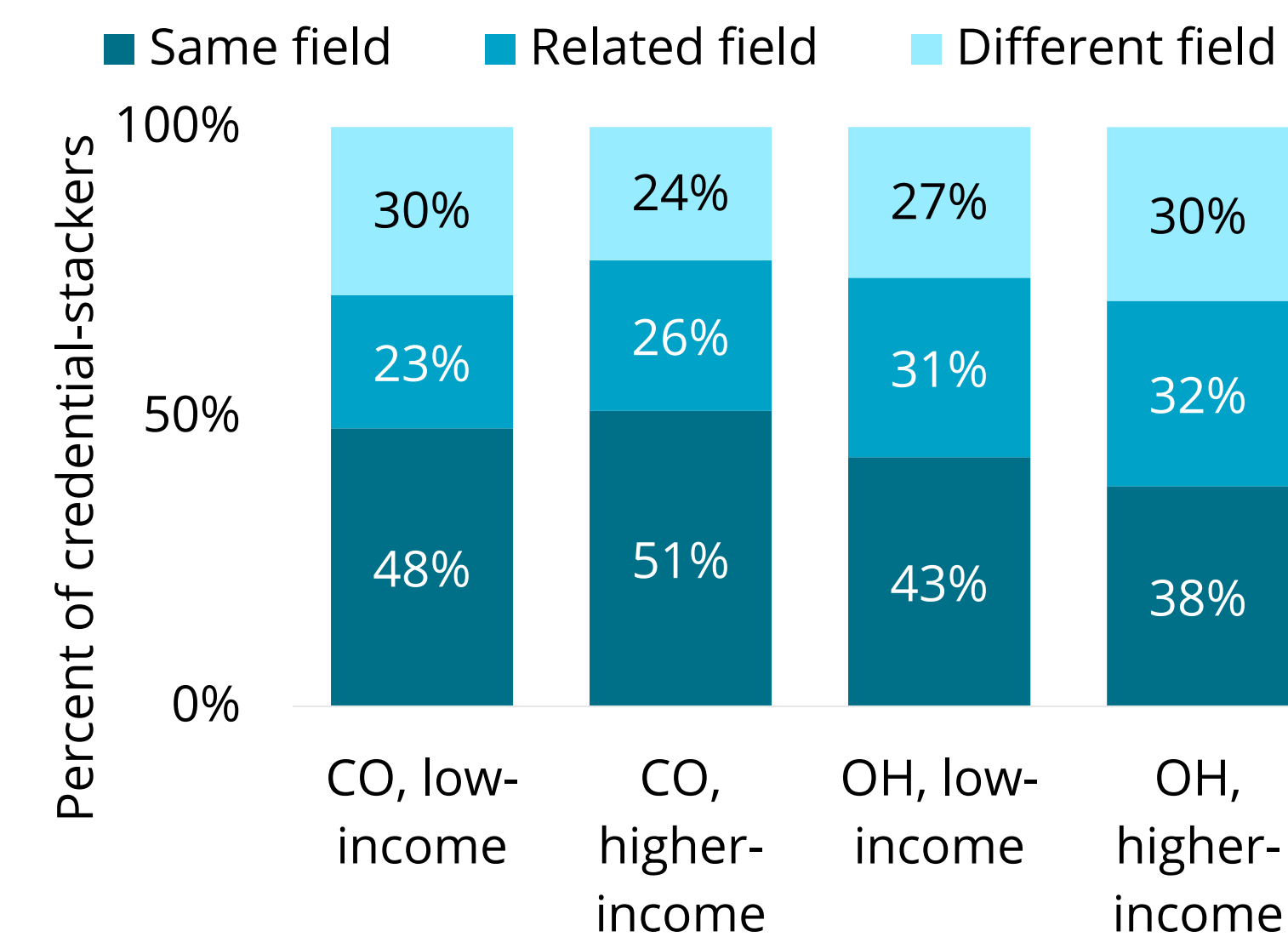
Compared to higher-income credential-stackers, low-income credential-stackers in CO and OH have:

About the same odds of stacking a long certificate (vs. a short certificate)

About the same odds of stacking a degree (vs. a short certificate)
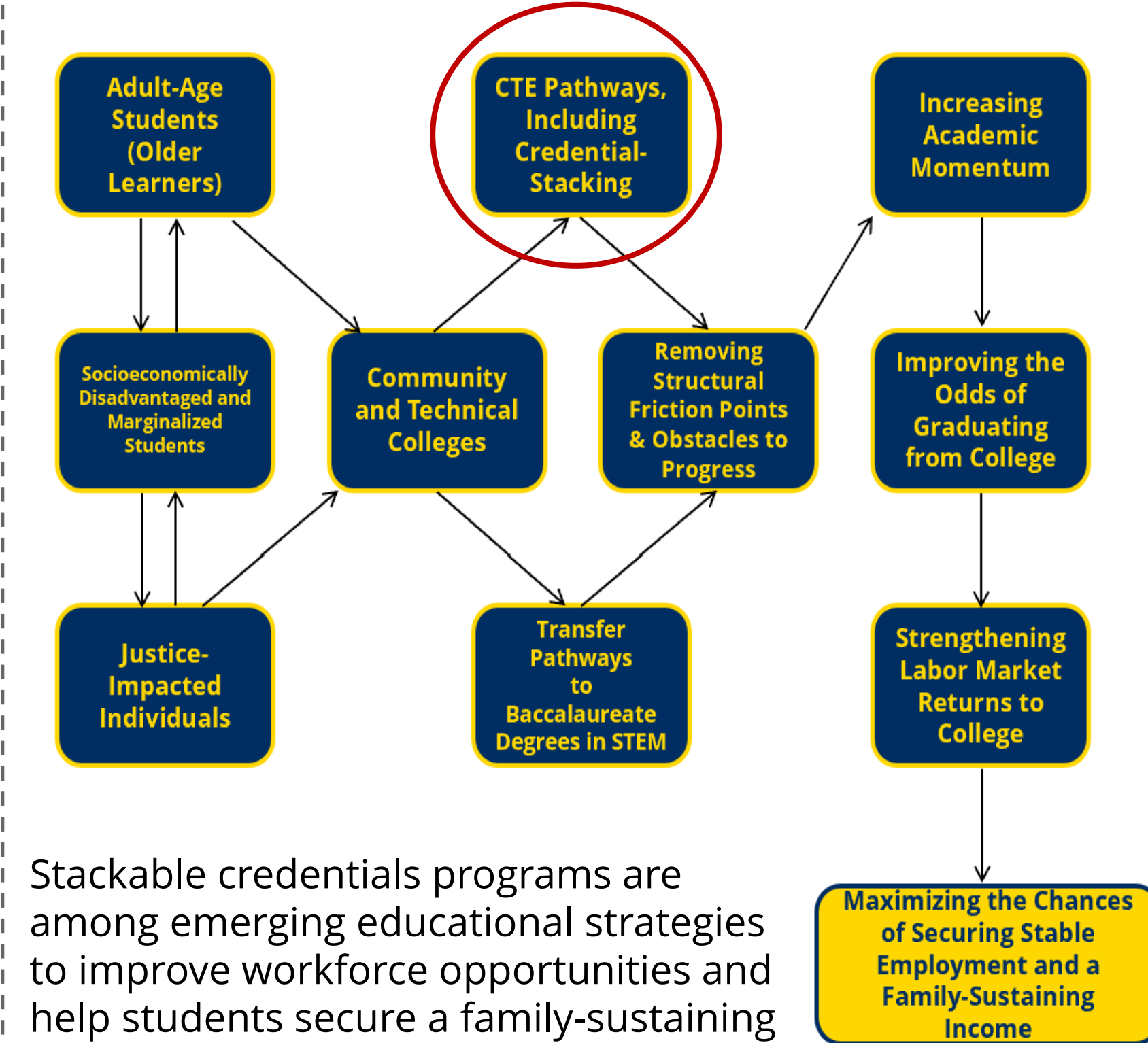
Notes. Results are based on cross-sectional multinomial logit models of credential-stackers, with controls for student characteristics, first certificate characteristics, cohort, and local economic context. See our working paper for details.

Finding: One-Quarter to One-Third of Credential-Stackers Change Fields, and Low-Income Stackers are As or More Likely to Change

Legend: Same field, Related field, Different field

Group	Same field	Related field	Different field
CO, low-income	48%	23%	30%
CO, higher-income	51%	26%	24%
OH, low-income	43%	31%	27%
OH, higher-income	38%	32%	30%

Notes. Sample of certificate-earners who stacked credentials within four years of first certificate. Results are descriptive, but conclusions are also supported by the results of cross-sectional multinomial logit models. Percentages might not sum to 100% due to rounding. See working paper for details.

Credential-Stacking in the Context of Our Larger Research Agenda

Stackable credentials programs are among emerging educational strategies to improve workforce opportunities and help students secure a family-sustaining wage.

For More Information

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