

Kentucky is one of the 10 states selected to participate in New Skills for Youth (NSFY), an initiative enhancing state efforts to increase the number of learners across the country who are prepared for success in both college and career. NSFY is a \$75 million national initiative developed by JPMorgan Chase & Co. in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group.

In the first two years of the initiative, the Kentucky NSFY team built upon existing opportunities to create a more comprehensive foundation for career readiness. New efforts launched through NSFY include establishing regional career academies, improving training and supports for Career Technical Education (CTE) teachers, and updating labor market data collection and analysis.

In 2018, the Kentucky NSFY team focused on:

- **Fully aligning all career pathways with labor market priorities:** By the end of 2018, Kentucky transformed or phased out virtually every career pathway that was not well aligned with labor market demand.
- **Implementing the regional career academy model and building upon lessons learned:** The first cohort of three new regional career academies opened in the 2018-19 school year, and six more received funding and technical assistance for 2019.
- **Expanding access to dual credit opportunities aligned to learners' career pathways:** The commonwealth moved to reduce barriers to entry for dual credit opportunities and minimize "random acts of dual credit."

The Kentucky Context

By the time Kentucky joined the NSFY initiative in 2016, the commonwealth had already recognized the need to better align the local workforce with the needs of the labor market. Kentucky was an early adopter of career readiness indicators in its statewide accountability system for high schools, providing an incentive for schools and districts to help learners earn industry-recognized credentials by graduation. Kentucky had also begun structuring CTE and other career readiness efforts around five key priority industries identified using data from the Kentucky Center for Statistics: advanced manufacturing; business and information technology; construction; health care and social assistance; and transportation, distribution and logistics.¹ The commonwealth also had mechanisms in place to strengthen career readiness in high schools, including the Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky program, which allows high school students to participate in pre-apprenticeships, gaining on-the-job experience and completing a portion of the required apprenticeship hours.²

The NSFY team built upon this foundation to ensure that each and every student in the commonwealth can access high-quality career pathways. Key among these initiatives is the regional career academy model, which aims to transform existing shared-time area technical centers to full-time regional career academies.³ While learners previously enrolled part time in CTE classes, traveling back and forth during the school day, Kentucky’s regional career academies will allow learners to receive academic and technical instruction all at the same place — making accessing high-quality career pathways easier for learners and reducing the burden on local schools. This new model strengthens collaborations between rural districts and increases access to high-quality career pathways throughout the commonwealth.

In 2017 the NSFY team also redesigned its New Teacher Institute to support CTE teachers and improve first-year CTE teacher retention rates.⁴ During the first year of the newly redesigned program, the retention rate jumped from 75 percent to 92 percent.

Fully Aligning All Career Pathways with Labor Market Priorities

One of Kentucky’s primary objectives for the NSFY initiative is to align 100 percent of career pathways offerings with priority industries and high-demand occupations. Early in the NSFY initiative, the Kentucky Department of Education released a comprehensive list of career pathways programs that are aligned with the commonwealth’s five priority industries and top occupations to help local leaders identify those programs in need of transformation.⁵ Since then, the Department of Education has provided technical assistance and support to local schools, helping transform virtually every career pathway to meet standards for quality and labor market demand.

After taking an inventory of existing career pathways, the Department of Education in 2017 began phasing out and transforming career pathways that did not meet alignment criteria.⁶ To ensure buy-in at all levels of the education system, members of the Kentucky Department of Education met with school administrators across the commonwealth to discuss the need for labor market alignment in educational programs. Plans to phase out and transform career pathways were met largely with approval by local school staff. By the end of 2018, the Department of Education had phased out 48

Life Cycle of a Kentucky Career Pathway

Stage 1 — Request Stage	Stage 2 — Pilot or Revalidation Stage	Stage 3 — Development Stage	Stage 4 — Active Stage	Stage 5 — Phase-Out Stage	Stage 6 — Inactive/ Terminated Stage
<i>“New” career pathway creation request/application received. Occupation/demand data support next stage/development.</i>	<i>State-level industry advisory task force formed. Standards, assessments and postsecondary connections established. Schools support development of “pilot” career pathway.</i>	<i>Assessment, program of studies, new course and equipment list developed. Teacher certification assigned.</i>	<i>Career pathway performance evaluated on an ongoing basis and supports continuously improved.</i>	<i>Career pathway targeted for phase-out due to duplication of effort or ineffective performance. Timeline established to communicate phase-out.</i>	<i>Career pathway no longer active. Foundational elements of career pathway electronically retained.</i>

Retrieved from <https://education.ky.gov/CTE/cter/Pages/CTECareerPathways.aspx>

types of career pathways and adjusted or realigned 19 others. An additional four career pathways have begun phase-out in the 2018-19 school year, and one more will begin in 2019-20.

In addition to providing schools with the guidance they need to align and phase out career pathways, Kentucky has put incentives in place to encourage participation in its vision for career readiness. For example, schools and districts can use state and federal funding to support career pathways only if their programs are aligned with priority industries or top occupations. While the initial review and transformation cycle has been completed, Kentucky will review programs at least every three years to ensure that they are still aligned.

Implementing the Regional Career Academy Model and Building Upon Lessons Learned

In 2018 the Kentucky NSFY team also made significant progress in advancing the commonwealth's regional career academy model, transforming three area technical centers into regional career academies by August 2018. Following an initial call for applications in 2017, NSFY provided grants of \$115,000 to three sites — Burgin Independent School District, Corbin Independent School District and Lee County — to design and open career academies serving students in their regions.

Local Highlight: Four Rivers Career Academy

One beneficiary of Kentucky's NSFY grants is the Four Rivers Career Academy. Previously known as the Fulton County Area Technical Center, the academy serves students from three school districts and offers five career pathways in

information technology, health science, business administration, welding and automotive. While the program was initially designed to serve high school juniors and seniors, Four Rivers Career Academy received funding and support from the Kentucky Department of Education in 2018 to restructure as a regional career academy, allowing the program to reach students as early as eighth grade. In partnership with the Four Rivers Foundation, a community-based organization founded to



support students in the four rivers region, the academy has been able to expand access to dual credit opportunities. Many students graduate with up to 30 hours of postsecondary college credit.

The NSFY grant, along with thought partnership from the Kentucky Department of Education, has allowed Four Rivers Career Academy to expand into the community in new ways. Next year the academy plans to adopt new technology to connect students across the four rivers region into academy programs virtually. School leaders have also set up new work-based learning opportunities, organized a school-wide job shadow day, and partnered with businesses and community leaders in the area as a result of NSFY.

Images provided by Four Rivers Career Academy.



The Department of Education selected six additional academies following a second call for proposals, which was launched in spring 2018. One lesson the Kentucky NSFY team learned from the first round of grant making was that area technical centers needed more support and guidance to execute the commonwealth's vision for career readiness. To address these challenges, the Department of Education made adjustments to the application process to provide more hands-on supports to local institutions. As a result, the second round of applicants were able to show stronger collaboration among school districts and a greater willingness to share resources earlier in the planning process.

The regional career academy model is particularly valuable for students in rural regions, who often do not have access to the number and variety of high-quality career pathways in their home districts. By encouraging collaboration among school districts and the engagement of local employers, the regional career academy model leverages existing regional resources to help provide equitable access to career readiness programs across the commonwealth.

Kentucky hopes to fund and open four additional regional career academies across the commonwealth in the last year of the NSFY initiative, bringing the total to 13 funded by NSFY. The cohort of academies will continue to receive support and partnership from the Department of Education as well as from peer academies in other regions.

Expanding Access to Dual Credit Opportunities Aligned to Learners' Career Pathways

Kentucky is also working to expand access to high-quality career pathways and advanced coursework by investing in new dual credit opportunities. In 2016, Gov. Matt Bevin established the Kentucky Dual Credit Scholarship (DCS) program through an executive order, providing funding for high school juniors and seniors to complete up to two dual credit courses free of charge.⁷ Since then, enrollment in dual credit has spread across the commonwealth. With the success of the DCS program, the governor then expanded the Work Ready Scholarship executive order to allow for two CTE dual credit courses per year for students in grades 9-12 in addition to the two free courses through DCS.

To encourage participation in dual credit, state leaders in Kentucky have taken a number of steps to promote and remove barriers to access. Most recently, Kentucky successfully organized a coalition to petition the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to roll back a 2017 policy that would have prohibited schools from teaching dual credit and non-dual credit students in the same classroom. This restriction would have limited the ability of many schools in Kentucky — particularly in rural areas — to offer advanced coursework. State leaders in Kentucky demonstrated that dual credit students are 33 percent more likely than their peers to persist through their second year of college, helping make the case for expanding, not limiting, access to dual credit. After hearing from Kentucky and other southern states, SACS rescinded the policy in December 2018.

Ensuring consistency of standards and accreditation across postsecondary institutions has also been a key priority, as the commonwealth's community colleges largely operate independently and have separate accreditation. To ensure more consistent implementation across the commonwealth, Kentucky's community and technical college system has established common qualification standards and guidelines to identify students who are ready to enroll in dual credit.

To further encourage schools and school districts to expand dual credit offerings, Kentucky integrated dual credit into the state accountability system as one indicator in the section called "Transition Readiness," which measures college and career readiness for high school students. The updated indicator will go into effect during the 2018-19 school year. Kentucky aims to reduce random acts of

dual credit and encourage learners to pursue dual credit courses aligned to their career pathway. The Department of Education issued guidance specifying that CTE dual credit courses must be approved by the commonwealth, aligned to secondary CTE course standards, and within the learner's career pathway to be included in the accountability system.⁸

Kentucky's focus on improving access to dual credit has already shown positive results, with a 145 percent increase in CTE dual credit course completion since 2016. By the end of the NSFY initiative, Kentucky hopes to see a 200 percent increase in the number of students taking dual credit CTE courses.

Looking Ahead

In 2019, the final year of the NSFY initiative, Kentucky's focus will be on supporting, scaling and sustaining core NSFY strategies. Gov. Matt Bevin is up for re-election in November 2019, making laying strong foundations for future sustainability all the more important. Ensuring a sustainable funding model for the regional career academies will be a major priority, as will expanding the number of work-based learning opportunities. The NSFY team is working to secure buy-in from local employers and businesses and to identify employer champions that can help expand the reach of work-based learning programs. State leaders are also working to establish a shared, statewide definition of work-based learning across employer and education partners.

To better align educational standards through the secondary and postsecondary levels, Kentucky also intends to build a statewide system of individual learning plans and career exploration programs. These plans will serve as roadmaps to guide high school students into the postsecondary level, focusing on aligning academic offerings at both levels and promoting dual credit opportunities.

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⁷ Kentucky Department of Education. Dual credit. Retrieved from <https://education.ky.gov/educational/AL/dc/Pages/default.aspx>

⁸ Kentucky Department of Education. *KDE-approved CTE dual credit guidance document*. Retrieved from https://education.ky.gov/curriculum/modcurrframe/Documents/KDE_Approved_CTE_Dual_Credit_Guidance.pdf